

Russian Soft Power in Eastern Ukraine, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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by

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Introduction

Everyone is familiar with war, threats, and other hard power strategies that countries pursue to get what they want. Hard power strategies are obvious when bullets and missiles are fired, but it is far more difficult to understand how countries garner support without using weapons. Military power is of course important in maintaining and advancing a country's global political position but is not the only way a country can hold influence. This paper will look at a different kind of foreign policy strategy, the use of soft power in frozen conflict zones. Specifically, this paper will identify, analyze, and evaluate the use of Russian soft power in the breakaway regions of Ukraine and Georgia: Donbass (or Eastern Ukraine)¹, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. This senior thesis will argue that Russian soft power has been effective in achieving its strategic goals by actively opposing another nation's soft power.

Russia is not the only nation employing soft power. Georgia and Ukraine are also engaging in the practice to further their own political agendas. It is relatively clear that Russia has the upper hand in military engagements, but the real battle for international position is in the soft power realm where Russia is vying for the hearts and minds of people in the breakaway regions. Likewise, Ukraine and Georgia are employing as many resources as possible to reestablish control of the regions in a way that reinforces their territorial integrity and makes them attractive partners in international organizations like the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

A big question to ask is, "Why should Russia care about these small regions in relatively weaker countries?" Russia is using these frozen conflicts to keep the so-called "pot boiling." As a former superpower attempting a comeback, Russia is looking to re-establish control in its historical sphere of influence. The ultimate goal is to halt NATO and EU expansion and regain

¹ This paper will use the terms interchangeably.

political and cultural clout. By destabilizing these regions, Russia can ensure its relevancy to international decision-making and keep Western influence from extending closer to its borders. While a strategy for creating and sustaining frozen conflicts is beneficial to Russia in a number of ways, pushing too far can hurt its geopolitical position. Russia risks souring relations with the West as well as the breakaway regions. Furthermore, destabilizing neighboring countries is, in general, a significant security risk, requiring resources and physical manpower to keep threats under control. Russia has had to commit a number of troops to maintaining positions in each region, but this hard power aspect will not be explored in this paper. The focus of this paper will remain on soft power strategies, and how they can be employed effectively in these cases.

I. Soft Power Background

The first step in analyzing Russia's soft power strategy is to develop an understanding of the term "soft power." As my advisor so eloquently said once, soft power is not only the ability of State A to get State B to do what it wants, but also its ability to make State B like it. Thus, soft power is a way to entice another into pursuing actions that are beneficial to you instead of using force. Joseph Nye, who developed the term in 1990, defines it as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments." It "arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies."² Conversely, hard power is forcing another to do what you want regardless of his or her attitude towards you. Nye developed the term in discussing American policies and global power, particularly surrounding the fall of the Soviet

² Nye, Jr., Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004. Print. x

Union. He claimed that the United States was not just the strongest nation in terms of military and economic power, but also soft power.³

In his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Power*, Nye further develops the term to combat misinterpretations and ignorance. He writes, “some have trivialized [soft power] as merely the influence of Coca-Cola, Hollywood, blue jeans, and money,” while some policy makers ignore soft power “and make us all pay the price by squandering it.”⁴ In order to effectively use soft power, nations need to know what it means, how it works, and what its limitations are.

According to Nye there are three primary sources of a country’s soft power: culture, political values (i.e. domestic policy), and foreign policy. Culture is defined as “the set of values and practices that create meaning for a society.”⁵ For culture to be an effective source, it should be based on universal values, or simply values that others share such as democracy and human rights. Culture certainly includes a nation’s popular culture, but it also includes cultural exchanges, personal contacts, and commerce.⁶ Political values and foreign policy go hand-in-hand because they rely primarily on government decisions. Policies should be genuine, responsive to the opinions of others, and based on a broad approach to national interests, otherwise policies could undermine a nation’s soft power. As Nye states, “The values a government champions in its behavior at home (for example, democracy), in international institutions (working with others), and in foreign policy (promoting peace and human rights) strongly affect the preferences of others.”⁷

³ Nye, xi.

⁴ Nye, xi.

⁵ Nye, 11.

⁶ Nye, 13.

⁷ Nye, 14.

Although soft power is indeed a powerful and useful tool for governments, it does have limitations. The most obvious is how difficult it is to measure its effects, a topic addressed in the conclusion of this paper. Nye points out that there are conditions in which soft power is useful. Soft power is most beneficial when countries are relatively similar, when power is dispersed (as it is in democracies), and when it is used to achieve general long-term goals. While some critics also say that soft power is too difficult to control because so many private industries and groups are involved, Nye sees this as a possible strength and an even bigger reason for governments to be involved and reinforce the nation's soft power. If a country has enough freedom to allow its citizens to critique the government, it is seen as more liberal and more attractive to many other nations.⁸

While Nye was the first to coin the term soft power, the general idea existed long before and speaks to sayings like, "You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar." In 1936 Harold Lasswell wrote in *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* that "elites" are able to influence through several channels, including symbols and practices. Lasswell defines symbols as "sanctioned words and gestures" that "elicits blood, work, taxes, applause, from the masses".⁹ These symbols promote the idea of the "common destiny," or as Nye says, universal values that are necessary for an elite's (or nation's) agenda to spread. The effective use of symbols enhances the elite's ability to get what it wants without using violence.

Lasswell also discusses practices, or "procedures [that] comprise all the ways by which elites are recruited and trained, all the forms observed in policymaking and administration."¹⁰ Essentially, he is describing how elites, or governments, can alter policy and practices to change attitudes and remain in control. This is what Nye calls the attractiveness of a country's political

⁸ Nye, 16-17.

⁹ Lasswell, Harold D. *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How*. New York: Whittlesey House, 1936. 313.

¹⁰ Lasswell, 360.

ideals and policies as mentioned above. When governments can promote universal values and be flexible enough to handle popular change, they are seen as more legitimate and appealing.

Carnes Lord, Professor of Military and Naval Strategy at the U.S. Naval War College, analyzes one aspect of soft power that governments can overtly control: public diplomacy. He defines it using the U.S. Department of State definition: “Public diplomacy refers to government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television.”¹¹

Analyzing the definition’s ambiguity, Lord points out that public diplomacy is most effective when it lies between informing and influencing. In discussing American public diplomacy he states:

Public diplomacy is therefore perfectly compatible with a straightforward approach to presenting the news that is not very different from what many would regard as the model provided by the commercial media. It differs from that model by tailoring the information it provides to the needs and concerns of particular audiences, and by engaging in proactive and sustained efforts to shape foreign perceptions and attitudes in ways supportive of American interests and policy.¹²

Rather than manipulation, or “spinning” of news stories, public diplomacy is most effective when it can convey a government’s point of view on different issues without trying to act as an unbiased news source. If independent media outlets are trustworthy enough, people will turn to a country’s public diplomacy efforts to figure out what the nation is thinking and why it acted the way it did.

While discussing public diplomacy and its relationship to soft power, Lord also points out a few areas of weakness in Nye’s work on the term. One area is the lack of a sufficient

¹¹ U.S. Department of State, Dictionary of International Relations Terms. 1987. p. 85. As cited in Lord, Carnes. “What ‘Strategic’ Public Diplomacy Is.” *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda, and Political Warfare*. Ed. J. Michael Waller. Washington: The Institute of World Politics Press, 2008. 43-60. Print.

¹² Lord, 44.

explanation for the complex relationship between hard and soft power. Lord discusses how hard power may act as an attractive force much like a soft power asset such as culture. Using the United States as an example, Lord claims, “Even countries that oppose U.S. policy paradoxically derive security, comfort and economic prosperity from the very military capability or presence that they so bitterly denounce.” In part because of this, Lord believes the term “influence” is more effective than “attraction.”¹³ This speaks towards the elusive nature of the term “soft power” and supports the idea that power is a spectrum more than a strict set of categories.

Many types of influence or power lie somewhere between “hard” military power and “soft” cultural power. Unfortunately, when trying to analyze soft power, a spectrum is much more difficult to evaluate than categories. Nye states that soft power is the ability to get what you want without payment, but how do we categorize situations in which countries give humanitarian aid in times of crisis or build schools and hospitals? These things certainly cost money, but they are not exactly payments or bribes either. What if the military is being used to deliver humanitarian aid or spread popular movies and songs to the nations they are deployed to? Are these troops considered hard power, soft, or both?

This ambiguity makes soft power hard to understand and even harder to use effectively. As Nye points out, it is often difficult to recognize the effects of soft power on short-term goals. Soft power strategies take time to plant, develop, and flourish. Nations can easily showcase hard powers with a few missiles and threats, but influencing a country using soft powers such as culture, government, or education system is much more challenging.

Dissecting Soft Power

¹³ Lord, Carnes. “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power.” *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda, and Political Warfare*. Ed. J. Michael Waller. Washington: The Institute of World Politics Press, 2008. 61-73. Print. 65.

As defined earlier, Nye's categories of soft power are culture, political values, and foreign policy. While these categories are useful and inclusive, they should be even more nuanced to speak to the unique nature of soft power and the wide range of activities it could include. Jonathan McClory, author of the *Soft Power 30*, builds on Nye's basic outline and the IfG-Monocle Soft Power Index to come up with a framework that includes objective and subjective data.¹⁴ While McClory's purpose is to rank countries according to their soft power, his categories and sub-categories are a great model for analyzing a single country like Russia.

Measurable, objective data is split into six sub categories: government, culture, engagement, education, enterprise, and digital. Government includes measures of "individual freedom, human development, violence in society, and government effectiveness" with the purpose of assessing how well the government's model provides desirable outcomes for its citizens.¹⁵ The ability of the state to follow through with its policies is particularly important because citizens look at other nations' governments and directly compare them with their own. The weaker the government the less legitimacy the country has in the eyes of the world's citizens. Russia's government, though democratic in name, acts like an authoritarian regime. Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization based in the United States, rates countries based on civil liberties within the country. For 2015 Russia rated "Not Free" with a score of six (out of seven with 1 being the most free and seven being the least) declining from five in 2014.¹⁶

Culture is measured by things "like the annual number of visiting international tourists, the global success of a country's music industry, and even a nation's international sporting

¹⁴ McClory, Jonathan. *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power*. Portland. 19-23.

¹⁵ McClory, 21.

¹⁶ "Freedom in the World: Russia." *Freedom House*. 2015. Web. 8 February 2016.
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/russia>

prowess,” which helps indicate the country’s promotion of universal values.¹⁷ In 2013 Russia had about 28.4 million foreign visitors, making it the ninth most visited country according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).¹⁸ Russia gained a lot of press and notoriety as the host for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and is now set to hold the FIFA World Cup in 2018. Although both events have been surrounded by controversy over infrastructure and bribing, Russia has been able to use these opportunities to attract travellers to the country and culture. Perhaps one of the most well known aspects of Russian culture is its excellence in performing arts like ballet, composition, and soloists, which has a long history of attracting many people to domestic and travelling shows.

Engagement is the ability of states to interact with the world and includes measurements such as “the number of embassies (or high commissions in the case of Commonwealth countries) a country has abroad, membership in multilateral organizations, and overseas development aid.”¹⁹ Russia has made a point to be involved in a number of international organizations and partnerships to increase its international clout. Not only does Russia have hundreds of embassies and consulates around the world, but it is also an active member of the United Nations, involved in a number of UN agencies, as well as a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), International Labor Organization (ILO), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and many others. Russia also participates in UN peacekeeping and observer missions.²⁰

¹⁷ McClory, 21.

¹⁸ United Nations World Tourism Organization. *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*. 2014. Web. 9 February 2016. <http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284416226>

¹⁹ McClory, 21.

²⁰ “Russia.” *Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook*. 5 January 2016. Web. 9 February 2016. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

The education sub-category measures the attractiveness of a country's education system through metrics like "the number of international students in a country, the relative quality of its universities, and the academic outputs of higher education institutions."²¹ Russia has been praised for its high level of education, and often ranks on international lists such as the Pearson/Economist Intelligence Unit.²² In 2008-2009 Russian universities had over 95,000 foreign students, with over half of them coming from CIS countries.²³ However, one of the greatest hindrances to attracting more international students is the Russian university system's incompatibility with the largely accepted Bologna Process, which is an agreement between European countries to ensure comparability in education standards.

Enterprise, though related to the economy "is not a measure of economic power or output," but rather "its competitiveness, capacity for innovation, and ability to foster enterprise and commerce." McClory measures this through measurements of innovation, entrepreneurship, and competitiveness.²⁴ Russia has an interesting economic system with a free-reign market in some sectors and complete government control in others. The Russians have a particular way of doing business, and success depends on foreigners' abilities to navigate superstition and

²¹ McClory, 21-22.

²² Coughlan, Sean. "UK 'second best education in Europe.'" *BBC News*. 8 May 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-27314075>

²³ "Численность иностранных студентов, обучавшихся в государственных и муниципальных высших учебных заведениях российской федерации." *Федеральная служба государственной статистики*. 2008. Web. 12 April 2016. http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b08_11/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/08-12.htm

²⁴ McClory, 22.

etiquette.²⁵ However, Bloomberg recently rated the Russian economy 12th for innovation, showing some acceptance for new ideas and businesses.²⁶

The digital sub-category is certainly newer than the other measurements of soft power, but it is important especially for its potential reach in countless fields. This sub-category aims to “capture the extent to which countries have embraced technology, how well they are connected to the digital world, and their use of digital diplomacy through social media platforms.”²⁷ Russia is particularly adept at controlling media within its territory and promoting Russian values outside it. On November 5, 2015, President Putin reasserted Moscow’s commitment to Russian-language media abroad “that provides ‘objective and honest’ information on Russia and ‘its achievements.’”²⁸ This is most obviously done through Russia Today, or RT, which is the Russian Government’s television network and Internet news source that provides news and programming from the Russian point of view. It operates in a number of different languages, including English, Arabic, and Spanish. Although Putin and the government discuss transparency and the need for objective information, they continuously ban different websites and programs. One example of this is VKontakte, the Russian equivalent of Facebook that has millions of users. The site has faced controversy with the government, displaying Russia’s struggle to control its population’s Internet usage and harming their international image on individual freedom.²⁹

²⁵ Heinze, Aleksej. “Business Meeting Protocol and Etiquette in Russia.” *Passport to Trade*. 13 July 2014. Web. 9 February 2016. <http://businessculture.org/blog/2014/07/13/business-meeting-etiquette-in-russia/>

²⁶ Jamrisko, Michelle and Wei Lu. “These are the World’s Most Innovative Economies.” *Bloomberg Business*. 16 January 2016. Web. 9 February 2016. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-19/these-are-the-world-s-most-innovative-economies>

²⁷ McClory, 22.

²⁸ “Putin Pledges Support To Russian-language Media, Universities Abroad.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 5 November 2015. Web. 10 February 2016. <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-putin-support-russian-language/27347201.html>

²⁹ Balmforth, Tom. “Russia’s Top Social Network Under Fire.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 28 May 2013. Web. February 10 2016. <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-vkontakte-under-fire/24999478.html>

While Russia can certainly be evaluated using all of these categories, this paper will explore Russian soft power through the culture, engagement, and digital categories. Examining these three categories gives sufficient evidence for Russia's use of soft power, but the other categories should be addressed in future research. Culture is obviously important to these regions to evaluate how much the people identify with the Russian culture and society in comparison to the countries that had territorial sovereignty over them. Financial aid, a part of engagement, is significant because of the fact that breakaway regions could not operate without Russian financial support. In the digital field Russia's broadcasting abroad is particularly important as a source for news and entertainment to people in breakaway regions.

While these categories are useful and Nye's definition has laid a strong foundation of understanding, soft power can be viewed through another lens. Nye says that soft power is the power of attraction, but he fails to address several important aspects of this tool. Soft power can also be used to oppose another country or alliance. While one would want to attract the target audience to one's position, keeping the target from being attracted to someone/thing else can be equally important.

Furthermore, Nye fails to address passive and active soft power. Passive soft power acts as a sort of foundation that already exists, and therefore does not require direct action. For example, many Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine speak Russian as a result of close ties throughout history. Russia does not need to actively teach eastern Ukrainians the Russian language because they already know it. On the other hand, only a small minority of Georgians speaks Russian as a first language.³⁰ In order to expand Russia's influence in the country via language, it would need to actively engage the Georgian population through practices such as Russian language schools

³⁰ "Georgia." *Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook*. 5 January 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

and exchange programs. Thus, soft power can fall into four different divisions: active and convincing, passive and convincing, active and opposing, and passive and opposing. Consider Table 1 below.

Table 1: Soft Power Divisions

	Convince	Oppose
Active		
Passive		

The target and message of soft power is important here, because a single aspect may fall into one or multiple divisions. For example, Russian news broadcasts in the Eastern Ukraine aim to 1) actively convince the populations that the Russian strategy is better, and 2) actively oppose the Ukrainian government's policies. In the first instance, the target of the broadcast is the population in the Eastern Ukraine, and the target in the second instance is the Ukrainian government. In these cases the message is the same, but it aims at affecting two different targets.

Thinking about soft power in these terms allows us to better understand Russia's soft power strategy as a whole. Identifying different aspects provides us with a clearer picture of Russian influence in the breakaway regions and other nations and which dimensions are more useful in achieving Russia's strategic goals.

Organization of Paper

This paper will analyze two different countries and three breakaway regions: South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk) in Ukraine. The next section, Section II, will discuss the history of the breakaway regions and their relationships with their

proper countries and Russia. This is critical in understanding why the regions would pursue separation and why Russia would help them achieve it.

Sections III-V will develop a better understanding of the tools Russia uses in implementing its soft power and how Ukraine and Georgia are pushing back. The third section will discuss how Ukraine and Georgia are competing with Russia through cultural elements like music, language, and tourism. The fourth section will explore Russia's engagement with Eastern Ukraine, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia to better understand the amount of support Russia gives the regions, and how critical that support is to their survival. The fifth section will investigate the digital battles taking place between Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia. Media, especially with the rise of the Internet within the past decades, has become increasingly important in influencing people. Section VI will draw final conclusions, identifying Russian goals and evaluating the effectiveness of Russia's soft power strategy in frozen conflict regions. Thus, Sections III-VI will demonstrate the main argument of this paper that Russian soft power is being used most effectively to oppose another nation's soft power and achieve Russia's strategic goals in the region.

II. History

The current soft power dynamics in Ukraine, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia can only be understood in the proper context. The following section will help put the modern situation into perspective.

Ukraine

Pre-Soviet Union

Ukraine has a long, well-documented history starting around 5000 BCE when humans moved into the Dnepr River region and raised crops and livestock. The river was a major trade route putting the people, who became known as the Slavs, into contact with people from Central Asia, the Middle East, and Scandinavia. A group called the Varangians converged with the Slavs and became their leaders, forming a new civilization centered in Kiev called Rus'. This marked the start of the Russian civilization. The Mongols conquered the area before the Lithuanian and Polish empires split the region in the 14th century and reunified it in the 16th century to protect against an independent Moscow. The Poles subjected these people, known as Ruthenians, to serfdom and many fled south to the Central Dnepr Basin to a contested region now known as Ukraine. They fiercely protected their freedom through a loose militia system and developed into a truly independent entity. These warrior-farmers became known as "Cossacks," and were soon powerful enough to raid Constantinople, Poland, and establish an independent country almost as large as modern Ukraine.

In 1630, the Cossacks turned to Russia for help in keeping the Poles from invading and soon became controlled by the Russian tsar. Ukraine remained under Russian control until it was split between Russia and Austria-Hungary in the 19th century. During this time Ukrainian nationalism was born. During World War I, eastern and western Ukraine fought against each other on opposite sides of the conflict. While the Russian Revolution was happening in Russia, several independence movements created different Ukrainian states leading to civil war. Eventually, eastern Ukraine became the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic within the Soviet Union, while western Ukraine was controlled by Poland through the Peace of Riga.³¹

³¹ Wilson, Josh. "Ukraine: Between Russia and Europe." *The School of Russian and Asian Studies*. 2 January 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.sras.org/ukraine>

Soviet Union

Ukrainians were treated like many of the minorities in the Soviet Union, with shifting policies that celebrated their unique culture at times and suppressing it at others. Collectivization programs caused a lot of suffering among Ukrainians, and many believe these programs were a focused attack that led to the famine in the 1930s known as “Holodomor,” which translates to “murder by starvation.”

During World War II, Ukraine remained split with the Germans taking control of Poland and western Ukraine and the Soviets maintaining the eastern half. The war decimated the region, and the Germans destroyed western Ukraine’s strong, vibrant Jewish population.³² Millions were evacuated and/or taken to German labor camps during the war, but after the war, deportations and purges continued to affect the population.³³ Ukrainians largely resented the Soviets, but they did industrialize and establish social programs in Ukraine. Under Khrushchev, the friendly relationship between the Ukrainian SSR and Russian SFSR was emphasized, leading to the transfer of Crimea from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954. The shift made little difference at the time because everything was under Soviet control,³⁴ but as we know today, this became a major flashpoint in Ukrainian-Russian relations. Ukraine became independent with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.³⁵

Post-Soviet Union

³² Wilson.

³³ Malynovska, Olena. “Migration and migration policy in Ukraine.” *Національний інститут проблем міжнародної безпеки України*. 14 June 2006. Web. 12 April 2016.

<http://www.niisp.org.ua/defa~177.php>

³⁴ “The Transfer of the Crimea to the Ukraine.” *International Committee for Crimea*. July 2005. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.iccrimea.org/historical/crimeatransfer.html>

³⁵ Wilson.

Ukraine as a democracy was relatively stable following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it did experience a large economic slowdown along with rest of the post-Soviet states. Political instability returned to Ukraine in 2004 with the Orange Revolution. Following the presidential elections that declared the Russian-backed Viktor Yanukovych the winner, protestors claimed that there was widespread vote rigging and pushed for new elections. The government held a re-vote, and the leader of the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yushchenko, won with 52 percent of the vote. Yushchenko pursued a liberal agenda that moved towards Ukrainian integration with the European Union and NATO. Unfortunately, his terms in office left the government with large internal divisions along pro-European and pro-Russian lines.

Economic issues persisted, especially around what has become known as the “gas wars” between Ukraine and Russia over energy prices. The issue was resolved in 2010 when Ukraine agreed to extend Russia’s lease on the Sevastopol naval base in exchange for reduced gas prices. This agreement was made possible largely by the free and fair election of pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych.³⁶

Although he was fairly elected in 2010, Yanukovych’s pro-Russian policy and surprise economic deal with Russia over one with Europe led to large protests and movement known now as Euromaidan. The protests started peacefully in November 2013, but escalated to violence as the Berkut special forces were sent to clear out the protestors under new restrictive anti-protest laws. The violence further outraged protestors, leading to stand-offs between police forces and citizens. The opposition put forth conditions to be met before it would negotiate with the government, including the resignation of the minister of interior and dissolution of the Berkut forces. In the long term, protestors wanted Yanukovych to resign, the dissolution of the current parliament for new elections, a return to the 2004 Constitution, and the immediate signing of the

³⁶ Wilson.

Association Agreement with the EU.³⁷ Protestors organized, built makeshift barricades, and established clothing drives and kitchens to sustain the movement. Clashes with police erupted a number of times, leaving over 100 people dead and hundreds more wounded.

In February 2014, Yanukovych fled Ukraine for Russia and denounced Parliament's decision to remove him as president and set new elections for May 2014. Just after Ukrainian parliament disbanded the Berkut forces and new leaders were appointed, pro-Russian gunmen seized key buildings in Sevastopol, Crimea, and unidentified men in combat uniforms, who we now know were Russian soldiers, appeared in Crimea. On March 1, the Russian Duma approved President Putin's request to use force in Ukraine in order to protect Russian interests. On March 16, Crimean citizens voted in a referendum to join Russia. The vote passed in a landslide, but was denounced by the West as a sham, leading to travel bans and sanctions from the EU and United States against Russian and Ukrainian officials involved in the referendum. On March 18, Russia absorbed Crimea into the Russian Federation.³⁸

In April 2014, pro-Russian protestors began to occupy buildings in Eastern Ukraine, escalating as Ukrainian troops were sent to retake control of the region. There were several failed attempts to stop the fighting in the region, but the conflict continued to rage on. In May Donetsk and Luhansk declared their independence following unrecognized referendums. On May 25 Ukraine elected Petro Poroshenko president, but voting was not held in much of Eastern Ukraine. In July, Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was shot down in rebel-held territory as both sides blamed the other for downing the civilian aircraft carrying 298 people. Even after the Russian Duma cancelled authorization of use of Russian force in Ukraine, the Ukrainian military

³⁷ Diuk, Nadia. "Euromaidan: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution." *World Affairs*. April 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/euromaidan-ukraine's-self-organizing-revolution>

³⁸ "Ukraine crisis: Timeline." *BBC News*. 13 November 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>

captured and made an exchange of Russian paratroopers. New sanctions continued to be placed against Russia for helping to arm the rebels in Eastern Ukraine.³⁹ The conflict finally started to deescalate in September and October of 2014 with the first Minsk agreement, but fighting continued throughout 2015. In February 2016 a new ceasefire agreement was reached in Minsk, but disagreement and conflict persist in the region over implementation. Both the United States and EU have extended sanctions against Russia into 2016.⁴⁰ The current conflict provides the context for the use of Russian soft power in Ukraine. Similar situations have occurred in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Abkhazia

Pre-Soviet Union

The first mention of the Abkhaz was in the 1st and 2nd century AD. The people spent time under Greek, Pontus, Roman, Lazica, Byzantine, and Ottoman rule. During the 11th and 12th centuries, the Abkhazian and Georgian kingdoms were united under one ruler before being split by the Mongol invasions that left much of Abkhazia relatively untouched. Abkhazia split into many small territories until being reunified in 1810 when the Russian Empire annexed the region. The Russians put a Christian ruler in place that caused a religious split in the region as many Abkhazian Muslims fled to the Ottoman Empire. This resulted in the depopulation of Abkhazians and an influx of Russians and Georgians until Abkhazians became the ethnic minority in the region.

During the Russian Revolution Abkhazia split into different factions with some wanting to join the new Democratic Republic of Georgia, the nobility supporting the Russian White

³⁹ "Ukraine crisis: Timeline," *BBC*.

⁴⁰ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline." *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. 3 March 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://csis.org/ukraine/index.htm>

Army, and the Abkhazian communists fighting for the Bolsheviks. Eventually in 1918, Abkhazia joined the Democratic Republic of Georgia as an autonomous state.⁴¹

Soviet Union

In 1921 the Red Army invaded Georgia, established Soviet authority, and made Abkhazia a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), or union republic. It was not until 1931 under Stalin that Abkhazia was included in Georgia as an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) despite protests from Abkhazians. Following this demotion a period of what is historically called “Georgianization” began, in which Abkhazian language schools closed, Georgian geographic names replaced Abkhazian ones, and history teaching was changed to suggest “that Abkhazians were ‘newcomers’ on Georgian land.” Furthermore, Stalin resettled even more Georgians in Abkhazia until they numbered roughly 40 percent of the total population in the Abkhazian ASSR. Stalin’s policies diminished after his death as Abkhazian schools reopened and the Abkhazian language was revived, but the tension did not disappear with Stalin.⁴² This process of “Georgianization” is the main origin of the ethnic hostilities that are the center of the frozen conflict today.

In the 1980s during *perestroika* and *glasnost*, ethnic tensions grew as nationalistic movements from both Georgians and Abkhazians increased. Abkhazians were afraid of Georgian secession from the Soviet Union and demanded the restoration of their union republic status, leading to ethnic violence and rioting in Sukhumi in 1989. Two referendums were held in 1991. The first one on March 17 was to renew the Soviet Union, and it passed with 98 percent of the

⁴¹ Golubock, D. Garrison, and Josh Wilson. “Abkhazia: Grandeur to Ruin...and Back Again?” 24 January 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.sras.org/abkhazia>

⁴² Kvarchelia, Liana. “Georgia-Abkhazia Conflict: View from Abkhazia.” *Demokratizatsiya* 6.1. 1998. Web. 12 April 2016. 19. http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/06-01_kvarchelia.pdf

vote in Abkhazia, but the local Georgians refused to vote in support of the rest of Georgia that had done the same. The second referendum for Georgian independence was held on March 31, and passed by a significant majority, but this time the Abkhazians boycotted the vote. The second referendum was enforced, and Georgia, including Abkhazia, left the Soviet Union.⁴³

Post-1991

In effort to keep tensions from escalating, Georgian President Gamsakhurdia tried to strike a compromise between Abkhazians (who made up roughly 17 percent of the population) and Georgians (who made up about 45 percent) in Abkhazia. Unfortunately, the compromise failed to satisfy either party, and the lawmaking body split into pro-Abkhazian and pro-Georgian sects. In 1992 Abkhazia pushed for independence from Georgia after a military coup raised fears that Abkhazian statehood was in danger. On August 14, 1992, Georgian forces attacked Abkhazia and fighting continued until September 30, 1993. The Sochi Agreement was signed at the end of July 1993, but the ceasefire was broken on September 16, 1993 by pro-Abkhaz forces. With simultaneous fighting in Mingrelia, Georgian forces were trapped in the middle and defeated. Fighting ceased everywhere, except the Kodori Valley, which was settled after another ceasefire was agreed up on May 14, 1994. Russia's role in this conflict was inconsistent due to the conflicting views of different politicians and the military, and both Georgians and Abkhazians received aid from Russia at some point in the conflict.⁴⁴

Human rights abuses occurred on both sides of the conflict. The Human Rights Watch report in 1995 stated the following:

⁴³ Golubock, "Abkhazia."

⁴⁴ Council of the European Union. *Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, Volume II*. September 2009. 74-80.

The combination of indiscriminate attacks and targeted terrorizing of the civilian population was a feature of both sides' deliberate efforts to force the population of the other party's ethnic group out of areas of strategic importance. The practice was adopted first by the Georgian side, in the second half of 1992, and later, more effectively, by the Abkhaz side. The parties terrorized and forced the enemy ethnic population to flee, or took members of the enemy population hostage for leverage in later bargaining over population swaps. The Abkhaz conflict stands out in that in some cases entire villages were held hostage on the basis of the ethnicity of their population. Once Abkhaz forces had gained control of Abkhazia and the fighting died down, they prevented the free return to Abkhazia of displaced persons, who are overwhelmingly Georgian.⁴⁵

After the conflict, political differences remained and hindered the repatriation of about 200,000 displaced persons.

The 2008 War between Russia and Georgia began over hostilities between South Ossetians and Georgians, but the hostilities extended into other regions of Georgia, including Abkhazia. Until 2008 Abkhazia had control of all its territory except the Kodori Valley. As Russian troops moved to take control of South Ossetia, Abkhazian and Russian forces retook control of the area.⁴⁶ A ceasefire was agreed upon, but Abkhazia remains a disputed territory in eyes of Georgians and much of the international community.

South Ossetia

Pre-Soviet Union

In the 13th century, the people now known as Ossetians moved into the region of South Ossetia. The people, called Alans, were fleeing the Mongol invasion of Alania, a Christian kingdom in the North Caucasus, when they settled across the Caucasus Mountains in modern-

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch (referred to as HRW). *Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations Of The Laws Of War And Russia's Role In The Conflict*. March 1995. New York. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Georgia2.htm>

⁴⁶ Amnesty International. *Civilians in the Line of Fire: The Georgia-Russia Conflict*. London. 2009.

day South Ossetia. After the Mongols, power was fragmented until the Russian Empire extended into North Ossetia before taking over South Ossetia and Georgia in 1801.⁴⁷

Georgia, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia, separated from the Russian Empire during the Russian Revolution. Ethnic tensions deteriorated relations between Georgians and Ossetians. The Menshevik-dominated Georgian government accused the Ossetians of working with the Bolsheviks, whose slogan ‘land to the peasants’ inspired armed soldiers from Ossetia and Georgia to return home and demand land from Georgian landowners. As the government in Tiflis (Tbilisi) tried to disarm these soldiers, tensions escalated and the Ossetians rebelled in February 1918. This rebellion was one of numerous peasant rebellions, but at this point it was a social conflict over land distribution, not an ethnic one. It was not until the Ossetian National Council, which was the main body for Ossetian political demands, elected a Bolshevik dominated Council in December of 1918 that the creation of South Ossetian independent political unit was demanded and the group refused to participate in the Georgian government.⁴⁸

The situation escalated as the Council began to construct a road across the Roki Pass to North Ossetia, and the Georgian government sent troops to disband the Council for new elections in 1919. On May 7, 1920, Georgia and Russia signed a peace treaty that recognized Georgian independence, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Russia was preoccupied with developments in the Russian Civil War.⁴⁹ The Ossetians then launched another rebellion with demands for the establishment of Soviet authority in South Ossetia despite the treaty. As the Georgians tried to reestablish control they began to see the Ossetians as traitors and the mission became a punitive expedition in which forty villages were burned, 5,000 to 20,000 people died,

⁴⁷ Golubock, D. Garrison, and Josh Wilson. “South Ossetia: Old Territory, New Problems.” 24 January 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. http://www.sras.org/south_ossetia

⁴⁸ Saparov, Arsene. “From Conflict to Autonomy: The Making of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region 1918–1922.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 62.1. January 2010. 102-3.

⁴⁹ Saparov, 106.

and about 35,000 refugees fled to North Ossetia.⁵⁰ The class struggle between peasants and landowners fell along ethnic lines, which allowed the conflict to develop into a distinctly ethnic struggle. This is the real start to the conflict between Georgians and Ossetians that persists today.

Soviet Union

When the Red Army established Soviet authority in 1921, South Ossetia presented a particular dilemma to the Bolsheviks; they could either grant South Ossetia autonomy as a reward for their support of the Bolsheviks, or they could keep South Ossetia under the authority of Georgia.⁵¹ In the end, South Ossetia was given an autonomous status within Georgia as the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast on April 20, 1922.⁵² This was the first time that South Ossetians had any official political entity. Georgia became the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (a union republic) in 1936 under the USSR Constitution that included the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Adjara Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast.⁵³ For the majority of the Soviet period that followed, South Ossetians and Georgians lived in peace and intermarried.

The Soviet Union had a four-tier ethno-federal hierarchy with the greatest political autonomy in the union republics and progressively less in the autonomous republics, oblasts, and okrugs. Minorities in the USSR were governed by a dual policy of maintaining and strengthening ethnic institutions while also promoting the use of the Russian language. By enacting this sort of policy, Russian became essential to Soviet society and led to greater ethnic assimilation of non-

⁵⁰ Saparov, 104-5.

⁵¹ Saparov, 120.

⁵² Nußberger, Angelika. "South Ossetia." *Oxford Public International Law*. 2013. Web. 25 April 2015. <http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e2068>

⁵³ "USSR Constitution." *United Soviet Socialist Republics*. Moscow. 1936. Web. 27 April 2015. <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html>

Russians, especially in the less autonomous republics and oblasts.⁵⁴ In South Ossetia, Ossetian was only taught at the elementary level, while Georgian was the primary language.⁵⁵ There was a backlash against the Soviet policies as *perestroika* began under Gorbachev, because non-Russians began to see the policies as destroying their group's culture and language. The ethnic institutions put in place as part of the dual policy towards minorities offered the platforms necessary for the eventual breakup of the USSR.

As of 1989, when the last official census in South Ossetia was conducted, about 66.2 percent of the population identified as Ossetian and 29 percent as Georgian (additional minorities included Russian at 2.2 percent, Armenian at 1 percent, and Jewish at 0.4 percent).⁵⁶ Due to rising nationalism in South Ossetia via the popular movement *Adamon Nikhas* (Voice of the People), the South Ossetian regional council asked the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR to be upgraded from an autonomous oblast to an autonomous republic on November 10, 1989. Georgians were generally outraged by the demands, seeing them as illegitimate and a threat to their territorial integrity. The application was rejected on November 16. Georgians planned a march on Tskhinvali, the motives of which are disputed, that led to violence on November 23. Between 12,000 and 15,000 Georgians were met by Ossetians, militia, and soldiers from the Soviet Army to prevent the group from entering the city. In the following days retaliatory

⁵⁴ Gorenburg, Dmitry. "Assimilation and Soviet Nationalities Policy." *Rebounding Identities: The Politics of Identity in Russia and Ukraine*, edited by Blair Ruble, Nancy Popson and Dominique Arel. Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Washington, D.C. 2006.

⁵⁵ Jones, Stephen. "Clash in the Caucasus: Georgia, Russia, and the Fate of South Ossetia." *Origins* 2-2. November 2008. Web. 27 April 2015. <https://origins.osu.edu/print/827>

⁵⁶ "Население Южной Осетии." *Этно-Кавказ*. Web. 27 April 2015 <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnsossetia.html>

violence continued leaving six dead, twenty-seven with gunshot wounds, and another 140 hospitalized [Human Rights Watch (referred to hereafter as HRW) 1992, 6-7].⁵⁷

The violence subsided, but South Ossetians continued their demands for greater autonomy, and the Georgian government prepared for elections that excluded Adamon Nikhas. On September 20, 1990, South Ossetia declared sovereignty as a democratic republic within the USSR, boycotting Georgian elections.⁵⁸ In response, the Georgian government abolished the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia on December 11, 1990, declaring the Soviet Republic of South Ossetia as illegal.⁵⁹

On December 12, 1990, Georgia declared a state of emergency and dispatched interior forces to Tskhinvali. The South Ossetians saw this as an occupation, and urban warfare and retaliatory ethnic attacks continued in the following weeks with Russia giving sporadic support to the South Ossetians. The flow of refugees became intense as Georgians fled Tskhinvali to escape ethnic violence and as Ossetians in other parts of Georgia were attacked. Informal negotiations led to the withdrawal of Georgian forces on January 26, 1991, but violence continued, worsening throughout 1991. Subsequent talks failed for a number of reasons, but one is that the nationalist focused Georgian President Gamskhurdia used the conflict to boost his appeal, keeping a multi-national commission, the Joint Control Commission (JCC), from resolving the violence.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch/Helsinki. *Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Violations of Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict*. New York. 1992.

⁵⁸ HRW, *Bloodshed*, 7.

⁵⁹ Law of Republic of Georgia. *Abolition of the Autonomous Oblast of the South Ossetia*. Signed Chair of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia Z. Gamsakhurdia. 1990.

⁶⁰ HRW, *Bloodshed*, 10

Post-1991

The Soviet Union announced its dissolution on December 26, 1991, but Georgia had declared its independence via referendum on April 9, 1991. Additionally, the Georgian constitution declared that both Abkhazia and South Ossetia were included in the sovereign territory of the country.⁶¹ South Ossetians held a referendum for independence from Georgia on January 19, 1992 in which the majority favored independence from Georgia and unification with Russia. Georgia rejected this resolution as a clear infringement of its territorial integrity.⁶² Violence continued until the Russian-brokered Sochi Treaty called for the withdrawal of military forces and established the Joint Control Commission of mixed forces to ensure the provisions of the agreement were met.⁶³ The war left the region devastated; about 1,000 people died, 100 went missing, approximately 100,000 Ossetians fled Georgia and South Ossetia, and 23,000 Georgians fled the region.⁶⁴

There was relative peace between South Ossetia and Georgia until President Saakashvili came to power following the Rose Revolution. One of his top priorities was the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia through economic and cultural programs “including an Ossetian-language television station, pensions, free fertilizer, and humanitarian aid” as well as the closure of the wholesale market with smuggled goods from Russia. Smuggling of goods was a major source of income in South Ossetia at the time. Tensions increased due to roadblocks that restricted traffic for the anti-smuggling campaign, but never reached warfare despite exchanges

⁶¹ Constitution of Georgia. Signed Head of the State of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze. Tbilisi. 1995.

⁶² HRW, *Bloodshed*, 11

⁶³ Agreement between Republic of Georgia and the Russian Federation. *Agreement on the principles of settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict*. Sochi. Signed for the Republic of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze and or the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin. 1992.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch/Helsinki. *Russia: the Ingush-Ossetian Conflict in the Prigorodnyi Region*. New York. 1996. Web. 27 April 2015. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Russia.htm>

of fire and dozens of casualties (HRW 2009, 18).⁶⁵ Tbilisi and Tskhinvali disagreed on the format of the JCC and Russia's role, which also strained Russian-Georgian relations, completely severing them in September 2006, which led to the expulsion of more than 2,300 Georgians from Russia.⁶⁶

Tensions continued to escalate despite renewed communication between the two countries by April 2008. Russia became more involved with the breakaway administrations and Georgia blocked negotiations over Russia's admission into the World Trade Organization in response. Each side conducted military exercises and violent skirmishes between South Ossetia and Georgia became more frequent. On August 1, 2008 several Georgian police officers were injured in a bomb attack in South Ossetia, and six South Ossetian police officers were shot in retaliation. Violence continued, and on August 7 Georgian forces began shelling Tskhinvali. Georgia claims they were responding to South Ossetian attacks and the imminent threat by Russian forces moving south through the Roki tunnel, while Russia claims that Georgia was the aggressor and it simply responded on South Ossetia's behalf.⁶⁷ It is unclear what the intentions of both forces were, but the war had begun when Georgian forces attacked Tskhinvali on August 7.

Around 10,000 Russian troops moved into the area forcing Georgian forces to withdraw from Tskhinvali to Gori city. On August 12, Russian forces pursued, and by August 15, they advanced past Gori city to within 45 kilometers of Tbilisi. The short war officially ended on August 16 with a ceasefire agreement calling for the withdrawal of forces to their pre-August 6 positions with Russian peacekeeping forces as security until international monitors could be put in place. Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on August 28,

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch. *Up in Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia*. New York. 2009.

⁶⁶ HRW, *Up in Flames*, 20

⁶⁷ HRW, *Up in Flames*, 20-2.

2008, and kept 7,600 troops in the two regions.⁶⁸

Human Rights Watch investigated humanitarian law violations during the conflict and found that all sides, Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia, disregarded international law by conducting indiscriminate attacks.⁶⁹ About 192,000 people were displaced by the conflict with 127,000 in Georgia, 30,000 in South Ossetia, and 35,000 in North Ossetia in the Russian Federation (Amnesty International 2008, 48).⁷⁰ Many were able to return to their homes, but a significant number (about 30,000 Georgians and 4,000 South Ossetians) remained displaced a year later.⁷¹

These conflicts demonstrate Russia's effective use of hard power, but Russia uses soft power in its foreign policy. Soft power allows Russia to further influence Georgia and the Ukraine. One of the most important components of soft power is cultural influence in areas such as music, language, and tourism.

III. Culture

Both Ukraine and Georgia share a number of cultural ties with Russia due to their inclusion in the USSR and long history as neighbors. Ukraine has a historically closer position to the Russian culture, but its strong independence movements have largely soured official relations between their governments. The cultural stage has turned into a competition of national pride, often dividing the Ukrainians and Russians. However, Eastern Ukraine has a number of characteristics that draw its citizens to Russia, including language. On the other hand, Georgia is

⁶⁸ HRW, *Up in Flames*, 25-6.

⁶⁹ HRW, *Up in Flames*, 2.

⁷⁰ Amnesty International.

⁷¹ "Georgia marks anniversary of war." *BBC News*. 2009. Web. 27 April 2015.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8188904.stm>

ethnically and culturally different from Russia, but this fact does not stop the two from competing in cultural dimensions.

Music and the Arts

Ukraine

While Russia and Ukraine are facing off militarily in Eastern Ukraine, the two countries are also going head to head in the musical realm. This is one example of how each country's soft power is being used to actively oppose the other. The Eurovision Song Contest is a popular TV song contest organized by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in which each participating country enters an original song to be performed and voted on during a live television broadcast. It's estimated that over 200 million people watch the event worldwide.⁷² The notoriety of Eurovision makes it the perfect stage for a country to spread its political agenda, however, the contest rules state that "No lyrics, speeches, gestures of a political or similar nature shall be permitted during the Eurovision Song Contest."⁷³

Although the rules are explicit, the contest remains a cultural and political battleground. In the May 2014 contest hosted by Denmark in Copenhagen, both Ukraine and Russia were finalists. Russia entered a song, "Shine" by The Tolmachevy Sisters, which received some criticism for its lyrics, "Living on the edge / closer to the crime / cross the line a step at a time." Seemingly foreshadowing Russia's annexation of Crimea, the song received some boos from the audience. When Ukraine's contestant, Mariya Yaremchuk, performed her song "Tick-Tock," she was heckled by a small group of Russian supporters in the crowd. Perhaps unknown to those

⁷² Storvik-Green, Simon. "Nearly 200 million people watch Eurovision 2015." *European Broadcasting Union: Eurovision*. 7 June 2015. Web. 12 April 2016.

http://www.eurovision.tv/page/news?id=nearly_200_million_people_watch_eurovision_2015

⁷³ "Ukraine picks song about Stalin purges as Eurovision entry." *Russia Today*. 22 February 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/333230-ukraine-eurovision-political-song/>

audience members, Yaremchuk is a supporter of the Party of Regions, the Ukrainian party of former President Yanukovich. While discussing the situation in Ukraine she said, “Everyone in Ukraine was shocked. It really affects me because I will try my best to prove that Ukrainians are a strong nation and conflicts end, but music lives. I hope Ukraine will start a new life and a new page.”⁷⁴ Neither Ukraine nor Russia won the 2014 Eurovision contest, but it is clear that the two nations were competing for more than music bragging rights; they were competing to change the international narrative of the Ukraine Crisis.

The latest Eurovision competition has once again sparked a controversy between Ukraine and Russia. With a record number of voters in the national selection, Ukraine’s 2016 entry by Jamala entitled “1944” harkens back to the deportation of Crimean Tatars by Joseph Stalin. Jamala, who is part Tatar and Armenian, said she was inspired by her grandmother’s account of the purges.⁷⁵ Some Russian politicians are speaking out against the song, calling it “politicized.” One representative, first deputy chairman of the Duma Committee on Information Policy Vadim Dengin, said “A strange choice. I’m sure it is there to once again humiliate Russia,” and even went on to say that “the majority of Ukrainian citizens do not receive enough ‘salary or pension’ and so cannot ‘afford to watch’ and ‘do not care’ about the Eurovision Song Contest.”⁷⁶ This is a clear attack against the Ukrainian government’s seeming inability to pay the citizens in the breakaway regions their pensions and other benefits.

⁷⁴ Sherwin, Adam. “Eurovision 2014: Ukraine and Russia in music propaganda battle ahead of final.” *Independent*. 7 May 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/eurovision2014-ukraine-and-russia-in-music-propaganda-battle-9333500.html#gallery>

⁷⁵ “Ukraine picks song.”

⁷⁶ “Russian Politicians Brand Ukraine’s Eurovision Entry ‘Politicized.’” *The Moscow Times*. 24 February 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-politicians-brand-ukraines-eurovision-entry-politicized/560492.html>

While Russian politicians took aim at the song, Ukrainian lawmakers and celebrities hailed the performance for its originality, emotion, and ability to win the 2016 contest. Ruslana, the 2004 Eurovision winner from Ukraine, when speaking about Jamala and “1944” said, “This is absolute originality, this is the suffering Ukraine that we are now.” Mustafa Dzhemilev, a Ukrainian lawmaker and a prominent Crimea Tatar leader, praised the song for bringing the issue to higher level. He said that after Eurovision “the whole world will know about ‘1944.’”⁷⁷ It seems that the Eurovision stage will once again be a sort of battleground for Ukraine and Russia to fight for international and national support using soft power tools.

Eurovision is not the only place where music, politics, and war have collided. Several Russian celebrities have chosen sides in the ongoing conflict. Musicians that have publicly supported Ukraine have been essentially blacklisted from performing in Russia to avoid dissent within in the country. Andrei Makarevich, Diana Abenina, and Noize MC have been called “traitors” and “friends of the junta,” which is what the Russian government calls the pro-Western Ukrainian government. Meanwhile, stars like Valeriya have come out in support of Russia’s moves in Ukraine, saying that “Crimea is Russian territory, it always has been.” Other artists have even travelled to Eastern Ukraine and mingled with the rebels on and off stage. In 2014, actor Mikhail Porechenkov fired a machine gun in the area around the Donetsk airport under rebel control. Singer Iosif Kobzon visited the Donetsk Opera House with the Russian interior ministry choir and invited a rebel leader on stage to sing a duet with him.⁷⁸ Russia and Ukraine have been going head to head in the music industry since Crimea was annexed and violence began in 2014. In 2016, there are no signs of this stopping.

⁷⁷ Tomkiw, Lydia. “Russia Calls Ukraine’s Eurovision Song Entry On Crimean History ‘Politicized.’” *International Business Times*. 24 February 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.com/russia-calls-ukraines-eurovision-song-entry-crimean-history-politicized-2321426>

⁷⁸ Rainsford, Sarah. “Russia’s music stars split in culture war over Ukraine.” *BBC News*. 30 November 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30087935>

Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Unlike Ukraine and Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not have professional music industries. Most of the popular music comes from Russia, because both regions are heavily influenced by Russian media and broadcasting, which will be discussed further in the digital category. Georgia has minimal influence within the regions, but, like Ukraine, they did face off with Russia at the Eurovision Song Contest. In 2009, Georgia submitted the song “We Don’t Wanna Put In” by Stephane and 3G. The controversial lyrics, “We don’t wanna put in / The negative mood / It’s killing the groove,” were widely interpreted as mocking Putin, who was prime minister at the time. Stephane and 3G did not deny that it was “a protest against Russian policies,” saying that “In any democratic country it would be taken as a harmless joke.” Although EBU gave Georgia the option of changing the lyrics or choosing a different song,^{84.9} percent of Georgians were opposed, according to the Georgian TV channel ‘Rustavi 2.’ Georgia withdrew their entry voicing suspicions that the EBU decided to ask Georgia to revise the song due to pressure from Russia, which hosted the 2009 contest. While Russia opposes Georgia in the Eurovision contest, its music has infiltrated the airwaves in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia drawing listeners to the latest Russian pop music.

Language

Language is a complex and important topic in many regions due to its dynamic and amorphous nature. In post-Soviet states, language and language policy is either heavily influenced by or created in opposition to Russia. Because the official language of the USSR was Russian, most states have populations that understand or use Russian regularly. This fact makes

language a great soft power tool, but also one that Russia has not had to directly control in many cases. Instead of actively insisting that regions use Russian as their official language, the breakaway regions have elected to do so willingly. After all, it was only 25 years ago that Ukraine and Georgia became independent from the USSR.

Ukraine

Today language in Ukraine is a contentious issue, splitting the country almost perfectly in half into Ukrainian-speaking Western Ukraine and Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine. According to the 2001 all-Ukrainian census, 67.5 percent of the population speaks Ukrainian and 29.6 percent speaks Russian. Eighty five point two percent of Ukrainians speak Ukrainian while 14.8 percent speak Russian. Of the Russian population, 95.9 percent speak Russian and 3.9 speak Ukrainian. It is not surprising that the mother tongue of each matched their nationality. What is more surprising is that the ethnic Georgians living in Ukraine speak Russian more than Georgian; 54.4 percent to 36.7 percent respectively.⁷⁹

In the now breakaway regions of Luhansk and Donetsk Russian speakers make up 68.8 percent and 74.9 percent of the population respectively. Furthermore of the ethnic Ukrainians in Luhansk about half speak Russian, while almost 60 percent speak Russian in Donetsk.⁸⁰ The data for all of the language percentages are outdated due to the lack of a complete Ukrainian census since 2001, but they are indicative of the overall trend of languages spoken in Ukraine. It is

⁷⁹ “About number and composition population of Ukraine.” *All-Ukrainian population census 2001*. State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. 2004. Web. 12 April 2016.

<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/>

⁸⁰ “About number and composition population of Donetsk Region.” *All-Ukrainian population census 2001*. State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. 2004. Web. 12 April 2016.

<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/Donetsk/> and “About number and composition population of Luhansk Region.” *All-Ukrainian population census 2001*. State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. 2004. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/Luhansk/>

unsurprising that the country is divided geographically, linguistically, and even culturally through the middle. This division makes Eastern Ukraine an easier target for the influence of Russian soft power. However, as Asya Pereltsvaig points out, it is important to remember that while Ukrainian and Russian are different languages, their similarity in structure, sound, and vocabulary make mutual comprehension relatively easy.⁸¹

Language has developed into a flashpoint in the Ukrainian conflict over the course of the conflict “and as a direct result of it.” In April 2015 Pereltsvaig concluded from surveys conducted by Kiev International Institute of Sociology that:

The more Russia intervenes in Eastern Ukraine, the more Ukrainians are pushed away from Russia: they do not want Russia to interfere in their country’s internal affairs, nor to see Ukraine with closer political and economic ties to Russia, and their attitudes towards Russians and the Russian language are worsening. Regional divisions—and the west-east continuum of identities, linguistic preferences, and political attitudes—persist, but even in the most Russian-oriented Donbass area, pro-Russian attitudes are not very strong and are apparently weakening.⁸²

Although Pereltsvaig concludes, perhaps a little optimistically, that the pro-Russian attitudes in Eastern Ukraine are “not very strong and apparently weakening,” language certainly remains a highly emotionally charged topic that requires clear legislation to unite the differing regions.

Early on in the conflict, following Euromaidan and the removal of former Ukrainian President Yanukovich, the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill abolishing a law allowing the country’s regions to make Russian a second official language. The bill was largely condemned by the international community and Russia, and remains unsigned but also un-vetoed by the

⁸¹ Pereltsvaig, Asya. “Ukraine’s Ethnolinguistic Landscape—and Changing Attitudes towards Russia and the Russian Language.” *Languages of the World*. 22 April 2015. Web. 12 April 2016.

<http://www.languagesoftheworld.info/russia-ukraine-and-the-caucasus/ukraines-ethnolinguistic-landscape-changing-attitudes-towards-russia-russian-language.html>

⁸² Pereltsvaig.

current Ukrainian President, Poroshenko.⁸³ It is unlikely that the president would move to enact the law because it would only incite further violence and separatist sentiments, but the fact that it remains a possibility shows just how important language is in Ukraine.

In this case, language is a passive force, acting as a foundation for other forms of Russian soft power. In Eastern Ukraine, the message that all Russian speakers are part of a larger *russkii mir* or “Russian world” resonates far better than it would in regions where Russian is actively taught but not natively spoken. Russia is able to invoke pride through language without spending time and money on crossing a language barrier.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Unlike Ukraine, language usage is not as controversial in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These regions have predominantly non-Russian populations, so, although Russian is an official language in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the population typically uses their respective national languages. In Abkhazia, the official language is Abkhaz with Russian used as the “means of inter-ethnic communication.” The de facto government also recognizes that Armenian and Georgian are common languages, but no statistics are provided for the actual breakdown of the languages used by the population. If it can be assumed that language usage is based on a person’s nationality, then roughly half the population speak Abkhaz, a fifth speak Georgian, another fifth Armenian, and a tenth Russian. The Abkhazian Ministry of Foreign Affairs lists nine language options for its website including: Abkhaz, Russian, English, Turkish, German, Italian, Arabic, Spanish, and French.⁸⁴ Given the large number of Georgians and Armenians, it is

⁸³ “Canceled language law in Ukraine sparks concern among Russian and EU diplomats.” *Russia Today*. 28 February 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/minority-language-law-ukraine-035/>

⁸⁴ “Republic of Abkhazia.” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Abkhazia*. Web. 12 April 2016. http://mfaapsny.org/en/apsny/overview.php?sphrase_id=42167

surprising that the government does not provide a translation of the website for these groups. Either this is a political statement by the government, or it is assumed that those populations can also speak one of the nine languages listed.

In South Ossetia, Ossetian and Russian are the official government languages while the Georgian language is recognized as official only in areas densely populated by ethnic Georgians. As of 2014, the population of South Ossetia was about 89 percent Ossetian and about 9 percent Georgian while the remaining 1-2 percent of the population was Russian or other.⁸⁵

Tourism

Ukraine

In 2014, about 42,000 Ukrainians entered Russia specifically on tourist visas. Russians report that about 9.8 million Ukrainians entered the country, but this includes tourists and all other entries, including refugees. Data for the first 9 months of 2015 showed that roughly 27,000 tourists entered Russia from Ukraine while total entry was around 7.8 million people.⁸⁶ Since the beginning of the Ukraine Crisis, tourism to Ukraine declined, up to 18 percent according to one report. There is anecdotal research that suggests that many Russians want to travel within Russia due to international sanctions.⁸⁷ A big hit to tourism and other travel between the countries occurred when the Russian and Ukrainian governments banned direct flights between the nations

⁸⁵ “Республика Южная Осетия.” *Министерство Иностранных Дел Российской Федерации*. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://archive.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-reuro.nsf/348bd0da1d5a7185432569e700419c7a/be2d70933881fb75c32579270040e8a1!OpenDocument>

⁸⁶ “Страны, лидирующие по количеству прибытий на территорию Российской Федерации.” *Министерство культуры Российской Федерации, Федеральное агентство по туризму*. 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.russiatourism.ru/contents/statistika/statisticheskie-pokazатели-vzaimnykh-poezdok-grazhdan-rossiyskoy-federatsii-i-grazhdan-inostrannykh-gosudarstv/strany-lidiruyushchie-pokolichestvu-pribytiy-na-territoriyu-rossiyskoy-federatsii/>

⁸⁷ European Travel Commission and Tourism Economics. *European Tourism amid the Crimea Crisis*. Brussels. October 2014. 20.

in October 2015. According to the Russian Transport Minister, roughly \$110 million could be lost each year in both Russia and Ukraine. Instead, would be air travelers need to take indirect flights or the much longer train trips.⁸⁸

In the months just before the Russian annexation of Crimea and crisis in Eastern Ukraine, a website for “adventure seekers who dream about reviving the USSR” can go and learn tactics for getting into Ukraine and, as one Russian said, “helping brotherly people defend their rights.” The Daily Beast, a news agency based in New York, has called this “insurrectional tourism” supported by the Russian government to obscure the origins of the men fighting in Eastern Ukraine.⁸⁹

The change in the Crimean administration is the largest difference in tourism for Ukraine and Russia. Instead of being considered a part of Ukraine, the annexed region is now counted as a part of Russia. Before its annexation, about 80 percent of tourists were from Ukraine, while roughly 20 percent were from Russia. This has shifted completely to be almost entirely Russian tourists, mostly due to the Russian government’s advertising campaign to get more tourists to Crimea.⁹⁰

Abkhazia

Abkhazians frequently visited Russia in 2014 with a total of 362,811 entries, but it is unclear what their purpose of entry was. The number of entries is significantly larger than the

⁸⁸ Rainsford, Sarah. “Ban due on direct flights between Russia and Ukraine.” *BBC News*. 24 October 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34622665>

⁸⁹ Shynkarenko, Oleg. “Russia Tells ‘Tourists’ How to Go Fight in Ukraine.” *The Daily Beast*. 13 April 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/13/russia-tells-tourists-how-to-go-fight-in-ukraine.html>

⁹⁰ “Crimean tourism trade suffers under Russian occupation.” *Ukraine Today*. 5 August 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://uatoday.tv/society/crimean-tourism-trade-suffers-under-russian-occupation-470413.html>

current population of Abkhazia suggesting that single travellers crossed the border multiple times. There is no data or explanation for the number from the Russian government, but given the strong economic relationship between Russia and Abkhazia, it can be assumed that many entries were related to jobs in Russia and not as much for tourism.

Although it is unclear how many Abkhazians visit Russia as tourists, for Abkhazia, tourism is a major part of the economy that has suffered since the conflict in the early 1990s. In 2014, the Abkhazian Tourism Minister Tengiz Lakerbai stated, “The war⁹¹ did us tremendous harm. In fact all the resorts were plundered. Now we use only 30 percent of what we had before the war.”⁹² Pre-conflict statistics on tourism are largely unreliable, fluctuating between 200,000 to 2 million. According to one report, tourist arrivals in Abkhazia peaked at two million annually in the 1980s⁹³, while another said about 202,000 tourists visited Abkhazia annually before the conflict in the 1990s. In 2003 the former Abkhazian Tourism Minister, Astamur Adleiba, claimed that tourism had reached pre-conflict levels; however, the Georgian government doubted the accuracy of the claim.⁹⁴

In 2009 Abkhazian officials reported that tourist entries reached one million, but this number can be deceiving because many tourists are “day-trippers.” These tourists cross into Abkhazia for the day and visit a few major sites before heading back to Russia the same day.⁹⁵ In 2014, the Abkhazian Minister of Foreign Affairs claimed that there were 3.5 million visitors

⁹¹ The Russian-Georgian War of 2008

⁹² Tsvetkova, Maria. “In Russian protégé Abkhazia, a cautionary tale for Crimea.” *Reuters*. 6 June 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-crisis-abkhazia-idUKKBN0EH0MX20140606>

⁹³ International Crisis Group. *Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence*. Europe Report No. 202. 26 February 2010. 6.

⁹⁴ Chanadiri, Goga. “Abkhazia’s Beauty out of Sight.” *Civil.ge*. 22 August 2003. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=4807>

⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, 6.

in the previous tourist season.⁹⁶ Both groups have an incentive to hedge the numbers in opposite directions to promote their view of Abkhazia's tourist industry. The Georgian government released information where the numbers were lower, almost certainly in an effort to prove that Abkhazia's economy is not as well off as it was when the region was a part of Georgia. Meanwhile, Abkhazia continues to report significantly higher numbers in order for the tourism industry to seem more stable.

Russians are attracted to the region because there is no visa requirement and the costs of visiting are extremely cheap in comparison to other destinations like Turkey.⁹⁷ While Abkhazia certainly has a lot to offer tourists on a budget, there are some Abkhazians who have shown annoyance with the Russians that visit the country's beaches and towns. In August 2014 the City Council in Sukhumi banned walking in swimwear outside of beach areas, calling on Russian tourists to cover themselves in public. Abkhazia is a conservative area like much of the Caucasus region, so speedo- and bikini-wearing Russians are viewed as vulgar and inappropriate to Abkhazians. The ban is seen as a bold move considering the large number of Russian tourists that Abkhazia depends on to keep its economy afloat.⁹⁸

The tourism industry may also feel a little bit of strain from competition with the Russian city of Sochi and recently annexed Crimean Peninsula.⁹⁹ In 2008, Abkhazia expected "massive economic development over the next few years" as a result of being recognized by Russia as an independent state, but there has not been much evidence of major growth in the region. There

⁹⁶ Chirikba, Viacheslav. "Abkhazia: Developments in the Domestic and Regional Context." *Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs*. 14 October 2014.

⁹⁷ "Visa Information." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Abkhazia*. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://mfaapsny.org/en/council/visa.php> and Tsvetkova.

⁹⁸ Lomsadze, Giorgi. "Abkhazia to Russians: Our Eyes Hurt, Please Cover Up." *Eurasianet.org*. 15 August 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/69561>

⁹⁹ Fuller, Liz. "New Abkhaz Prime Minister Faces Uphill Struggle To End Economic Stagnation." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 30 March 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.rferl.org/content/caucasus-report-abkhazia-new-prime-minister-mikvabia/26928300.html>

was a lot of hope that the 2014 Winter Olympics would bring Abkhazians a lot of jobs just across the border.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, a lot of those hopes were not realized due to politics, security, and corruption. In the political realm, the Georgian government actively cooperated with Russia on the Games by offering to provide security¹⁰¹, undercutting the importance of Abkhazian collaboration. The Abkhazian airport and tourist sites were not used for the Games, despite their close proximity to Sochi, because security on the Abkhaz-Russian border was substantially tightened. Russia needed to ensure that there was no chance of terrorist groups using Abkhazia as a way to enter Russia and attack Sochi, which limited Abkhazians mobility across the border. Furthermore, corruption within Russia meant that other companies were favored as suppliers over their Abkhazian counterparts. Despite these negative aspects, Abkhazians did not feel negatively about Russia because the Games also helped bring attention to the region and increased the security in Abkhazia as a whole.¹⁰²

While tourism is the largest part of the Abkhazian economy that is not directly funded by the Russian government, it is supported almost entirely by Russian private citizens. Despite cultural differences and disappointing returns on their Olympic hopes, Abkhazia's dependence and opinion on its northern neighbor is not likely to change.

¹⁰⁰ "Russia woos Georgian territory with jobs, tourists." *Global Travel Industry News*. 28 September 2008. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.eturbonews.com/5270/russia-woos-georgian-territory-jobs-tourists>

¹⁰¹ Menabde, Giorgi. "The Olympic Truce Between Russia and Georgia." *The Jamestown Foundation*. 18 April 2014. Web. 12 April 2016.

http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42250&no_cache=1#.VuSYnMfm-G8

¹⁰² Kvarchelia, Liana. "Expectations and fears within Abkhaz society in relation to the Sochi Olympics." *International Alert*. 1 August 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.international-alert.org/blog/expectations-and-fears-within-abkhaz-society-relation-sochi-olympics#sthash.LbRdMJJC.dpbs>

South Ossetia

Unlike Abkhazia and Ukraine, South Ossetia does not offer much in terms of tourist sites or amenities. Like Abkhazia, there is no visa requirement to travel between South Ossetia and Russia. However, travel entries between Russia and South Ossetia is completely one-sided with 117, 283 entries into Russia from South Ossetia in 2014.¹⁰³ Again the number of entries is much larger than the population of South Ossetia, meaning that travellers are crossing the border multiple times. This suggests that crossings are more regular and are probably more for conducting business than cultural exchanges and tourism. There is no data on the number of Russian tourists or visitors entering South Ossetia. Therefore, the effects of tourism in the region are negligible, and likely have no bearing on relations or the population's attitude towards Russia.

IV. Engagement

Russian engagement in the breakaway regions is extensive and includes everything from monetary and humanitarian aid to the opening of embassies and issuing of Russian passports. As Russia used its hard power in supplying weapons and soldiers to the Eastern Ukrainian separatists, it also opened the door for Russian soft power to be exercised in the region. The fighting in Donbass provided the perfect opportunity for Russia to save the day with humanitarian aid to the people. Russia set itself up to be the hero nation that the Eastern Ukrainians could turn to when their own government could do nothing to help them. Meanwhile, with most of the world focused on the conflict in Ukraine, Russia quietly signed agreements with the breakaway regions in Georgia. Strengthening these partnerships has been criticized as the effective annexation of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

¹⁰³ “Страны лидирующие.”

Ukraine

The largest amount of support that Russia provides to the breakaway region in Eastern Ukraine is humanitarian aid in the form of food, supplies, and refugee shelters. Following the annexation of Crimea and Euromaidan protests, the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) declared its independence from Ukraine on April 7, 2014.¹⁰⁴ The Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) declared independence shortly after the DPR but quickly agreed to merge in a confederation called Novorossiia. Only South Ossetia has recognized the independence of the region, doing so on June 27, 2014.¹⁰⁵ Nearly two years later, Russia has still not recognized the region's independence. This is most likely due to the constantly changing frontline of the war and unstable ceasefire, but refraining from recognizing these regions as independent serves another purpose; it keeps the conflict from being settled politically. Russia publicly maintains its support of Eastern Ukraine under the banner of protecting all Russians regardless of their citizenship to keep up popular opinion in the region, while simultaneously refusing to recognize their independence. Thus, Russia does not need to recognize the DPR because it can win the hearts and minds of the people in the Donbass region by supplying humanitarian aid to the war stricken area.

The Donbass region as a whole has received thousands of tons of humanitarian aid from Russia. In October 2015 Russia sent a 100-truck convoy with more than 1,000 tons of food and

¹⁰⁴ "Ukraine crisis: Protesters declare Donetsk 'republic.'" *BBC News*. 7 April 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26919928>

¹⁰⁵ "South Ossetia recognizes independence of Donetsk People's Republic." *TASS*. 27 June 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://tass.ru/en/world/738110>

other items, delivering more than 50,000 tons of aid in one year.¹⁰⁶ The aid flow has not slowed down since. The 49th envoy of 101 Russian trucks was sent in February 2016, but Ukrainian border guards raised concerns about the contents, claiming the canned food was expired.¹⁰⁷

The Russian Emergency Affairs Minister Vladimir Stepanov, while discussing the aide envoy, stated that Russian hospitals would also care for another 20 children injured in the combat zone.¹⁰⁸ In June 2014 over 6,300 Ukrainians have sought treatment from Russian doctors in the 227 Ukrainian refugee camps that were set up in Russian regions.¹⁰⁹ As of August 2015, about 21,000 refugees live in 369 temporary camps. The Russian government eased the migration rules for Ukrainians seeking safety from the violence in the Donbass region, allowing entry with internal passports.¹¹⁰

In December 2015, the head of the Mercator Group, a Moscow-based think tank, said that while Russia could use the workers, the government was not prepared for the large influx of Ukrainians. Another report says that many skilled workers from Ukraine have had a hard time finding legal work for which they are qualified. For the refugees the bureaucratic headache has led many to experience long waits for permits, to have bribes demanded from them, or even to ignore the need for proper documentation altogether. Russia has made exceptions for Ukrainians who have fled from the war in Donbass, but other Ukrainians who have fled for political reasons

¹⁰⁶ “Moscow dispatches humanitarian convoy to Ukraine’s east.” *PressTV*. 22 October 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/10/22/434462/Russia-Ukraine-Donbass-ceasefire-proRussia-forces->

¹⁰⁷ “Russian truck convoy makes 'humanitarian aid' delivery to Ukraine.” 19 February 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://uatoday.tv/politics/russian-truck-convoy-makes-humanitarian-aid-delivery-to-ukraine-594719.html>

¹⁰⁸ “49th so-called Russian aid convoy ready to depart for eastern Ukraine.” *Ukraine Today*. 28 January 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://uatoday.tv/politics/49th-so-called-russian-aid-convoy-ready-to-depart-for-eastern-ukraine-580055.html>

¹⁰⁹ “Russian hospitals provide treatment to wounded refugees from south-east Ukraine.” *TASS*. 27 June 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://tass.ru/en/russia/738002>

¹¹⁰ In Russia and Ukraine, citizens can have international or internal passports. The latter is similar to driver’s licenses in the United States. “Russia prolongs lax migration rules for Ukrainian citizens.” *TASS*. 1 August 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://tass.ru/en/russia/812040>

have had to renew all their documents or be deported. While some Ukrainians are adamant that they are not going back to Ukraine, these issues and the Minsk peace talks have led to fears that there will be a mass reverse exodus and Russia will lose a vital opportunity to hold onto these well-educated people.¹¹¹

In February 2016, the Russian Ministry of Economic Development supported an initiative from the State Duma to increase the population beyond the Ural Mountains by creating some 50,000 jobs that could be taken by Ukrainians. The program has received some criticism from the Federal Migration Service that has said that a specific program is unnecessary.¹¹² Whether successful or not, campaigns such as this are proof that Russian politicians are aware that Ukrainians could be a valuable resource to Russia as human capital as well as the spread of pro-Russian sentiment.

Although Russia only publicly supports the Peoples Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk through humanitarian aide, it has also provided the funds to pay the salaries of government workers in Eastern Ukraine. Until June and part of July 2014, the Ukrainian government in Kiev paid the salaries of public servants in euros or hryvnia. Through the fall and winter of 2014-2015 these workers received little to no salary because the region was under rebel control. From April 2015 onward, these salaries have been drastically reduced and paid in Russian rubles. The drastic rise in food prices to sync with the Russian economy has hurt those in Eastern Ukraine. The people are mostly relying on double pensions, receiving money from both Russia (via the new republics) and Ukraine. Receiving the double pension requires a great deal of work and includes

¹¹¹ Weir, Fred. "Ukrainian refugees in Russia: Did Moscow fumble a valuable resource?" *The Christian Science Monitor*. 1 December 2015. Web. 12 April 2016.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2015/1201/Ukrainian-refugees-in-Russia-Did-Moscow-fumble-a-valuable-resource>

¹¹² "Ukrainian refugees to be offered to settle down in Siberia, Far East — media." *TASS*. 16 February 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://tass.ru/en/economy/856936>

crossing the frontlines of the conflict. Ukrainian politicians are aware that people are receiving double pensions, but they have decided to not take direct action against the practice, as it is not in Ukraine's best interest to "punish its citizens in occupied territories." But while pensions are being handed out, social benefits require citizens to have residency in the area controlled by Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian Ministry for Social Affairs in Kiev, payments for social benefits in Donetsk and Luhansk have fallen by about 70 percent, but risen about the same number in other regions. This suggests that the people are still managing to get social benefits by registering as refugees while continuing to live in Donetsk in Luhansk.¹¹³ Neither system alone is enough for the people living in the regions to survive, but by exploiting the unofficial nature of the programs, most are able to barely maintain their families.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Following the conflicts in the early 1990s and again in the 2000s, Russia issued nearly all South Ossetians and Abkhazians Russian passports. The laws on citizenship in both Russia and Georgia identify the main documentation of national citizenship as the passport. Possession of a passport from either is essentially proof of citizenship. For Russia, the process of obtaining a Russian passport as a resident in a former Soviet state that had not become a citizen of the new state was simplified in 2002. The process was further simplified for Abkhazians and South Ossetians who did not even need to leave their homes to obtain Russian citizenship; their documents were simply sent to the closest Russian city to be verified. Nearly 90 percent of the

¹¹³ Röpcke, Von Julian. "How Russia finances the Ukrainian rebel territories." *BILD*. 16 January 2016. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/ukraine-konflikt/russia-finances-donbass-44151166.bild.html>

less than 100,000 South Ossetians,¹¹⁴ and by June of 2002, an estimated seventy percent of the people in Abkhazia held Russian citizenship through this process.¹¹⁵ These new Russian citizens guaranteed that Russia would have a say in South Ossetian and Abkhazian politics. When Russia invaded Georgia in the 2008 war, this claim of protecting Russian citizens and the innocent South Ossetians and Abkhazians was used as validation.¹¹⁶

Immediately after the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia recognized the two regions as independent and established diplomatic ties on September 9, 2008.¹¹⁷ Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia established embassies in Moscow in late 2008 and early 2009,¹¹⁸ while Russia has embassies in the capitals of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well.

Russia provided about 70 percent of Abkhazia's 11.75-billion ruble (\$179.3 million) 2015 budget.¹¹⁹ Other than Russia's direct financial support Abkhazia's economy relies heavily on tourism, particularly Russian tourists, and a few cash crops like wine, tea, tobacco, fruit, and nuts that are, again, mostly exported to Russia.¹²⁰ As discussed earlier, Russians support nearly all of Abkhazia's tourist industry, and the close economic relationship between the two is unlikely to go away over a few cultural disagreements on clothing.

¹¹⁴ "Russian Federation: Legal Aspects of War in Georgia." *Library of Congress*. 2014. Web. 27 April 2015. <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/russian-georgia-war.php>

¹¹⁵ Khashig, Inal. "Abkhaz Rush For Russian Passports." *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*. 27 June 2002. Web. 12 April 2016. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/abkhaz-rush-russian-passports>

¹¹⁶ Medvedev, Dmitry. Interview with TF1 Television. *President of Russia*. 26 August 2008. Web. 27 April 2015. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1229>

¹¹⁷ Solovyev, Vladimir. "Freshly Recognized." *Kommersant*. 10 September 2008. Web. 12 April 2016. http://www.kommersant.com/p1023629/r_538/South_Ossetia_Abkhazia_recognition/

¹¹⁸ "Список руководителей дипломатических и консульских представительств зарубежных государств в России." *Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации*. 5 October 2011. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://archive.mid.ru/nsite-sv.nsf/mnsdoc/10.02.03>

¹¹⁹ Rimple, Paul. "Economics Not Impacting Russian Support for Georgian Separatists." *Eurasianet.org*. 13 February 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/72066>

¹²⁰ Golubock, "Abkhazia."

Relations between Abkhazia and Russia were strengthened in November 2014 when Russian President Putin and Abkhazian President Raul Khadzhimba signed the agreement On Alliance and Strategic Partnership. The agreement includes provisions for mutual defense, a 3-year plan for the modernization of the Abkhazian army, establishment of a joint military force, building of defenses along Abkhazia's border, increased aid for social programs (education, healthcare, pensions), and increasing pressure on other nations and international organizations to recognize Abkhazia's independence. Abkhazia is also taking steps to become integrated in the Eurasian Economic Union that includes Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Although the agreement was largely supported in Abkhazia, the opposition party, Amsakhara, protested against it for providing Russia with too much leverage in Abkhazia's internal affairs. However, Amsakhara does not oppose the provisions on defense, only those focused on economic integration.¹²¹

Unlike Abkhazia, which has the geographical position and resources for some economic development, South Ossetia has almost no sizeable investments or resources to grow economically. In recent years the Russian government has provided 90-99 percent of the republic's budget, including all social services and pensions.¹²² As of February 2015, South Ossetia received over 91 percent of its 7.3-billion-ruble (\$111.4 million) budget from Russia.¹²³

Ties between South Ossetia and Russia have increased since recognition in 2008 and have culminated in the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia on Alliance and Integration signed on March 18, 2015. The agreement is similar to the one signed by Russia and Abkhazia in November 2014 and will expire in 25 years with the

¹²¹ "Collective defense partnership: Russia, Abkhazia sign alliance." *Russia Today*. 25 November 2014. Web. 12 April 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/208327-ruissia-abkhazia-alliance-treaty/>

¹²² Mirimanova, Natalia. "Local Business, Local Peace: the Peacebuilding Potential of the Domestic Private Sector Case study South Caucasus." *International Alert*. 2006. 520

¹²³ Rimple.

possibility of ten-year extensions.¹²⁴ The provisions of the document include the following:

1. Greater cooperation in social sector, including raising pensions and public sector wages and establishing a compulsory insurance system,
2. Simplifying the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship,
3. Establishing common defense and security space, integrate customs services, and allow for free movement across the interstate border for citizens
4. Establishing the Interior Ministry Joint Coordination Centre to fight terrorism and organized crime,
5. Beginning the Socioeconomic Development Investment Programme for 2015-2017 with 9 billion rubles allocated for 36 projects in housing, culture and education, transport infrastructure, and a modern healthcare center in Tskhinvali.¹²⁵

This agreement has been largely criticized by the West for being seen as the effective annexation of South Ossetia. In fact, the agreement was signed on the one-year anniversary of the annexation of Crimea. The money, aid, programs, and partnerships outlined in the agreement shows Georgia and the rest of the world that Russia plans to continue their support of these regions as states. Russia is propping them up so that they have no need or desire to return to the Georgian administration.

While Russia has promised South Ossetia a lot of aid, corruption has been a major problem. Following the 2008 war, the majority of Russian aid promised to the region never reached the population. Of the \$55 million in priority aid, only \$1.4 million had been spent on reconstruction according to the Russian federal audit chamber. Approximately \$33 million had been lost or misused, and 20 cases were opened against former officials who stole \$22 million.¹²⁶ However, given that Russia funds nearly all of South Ossetia's budget, the breakaway region does not have the luxury of turning down any money, no matter how corrupt the delivery

¹²⁴ "Meeting with President of South Ossetia Leonid Tibilov." *President of Russia Events*. 18 March 2015. Web. 27 April 2015. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47873>

¹²⁵ "Press statement following talks with President of South Ossetia Leonid Tibilov." *President of Russia Events*. 18 March 2015. Web. 27 April 2015. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/47876>

¹²⁶ Vartanyan, Olesya and Ellen Barry. "If History Is a Guide, Crimeans' Celebration May Be Short-Lived." *New York Times*. 18 March 2014. Web. 27 April 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/world/europe/south-ossetia-crimea.html?hp&_r=1

channels may be.

One aspect of life in South Ossetia and Abkhazia where Georgia has the upper hand over Russia is healthcare. Abkhazian ambulances run between Abkhazia and clinics in Zugdidi, Kutaisi, and Tbilisi when patients are critically ill. Officials are not supportive of the practice, but they have not tried to stop their residents from receiving medical attention. It would be difficult to defend a policy that negatively impacted the healthcare of citizens, and the Georgians understand this. The Georgian State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Paata Zakareishvili said that there is no need to advertise this process because it is a humanitarian mission and residents from Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue to come despite obstacles.¹²⁷

South Ossetians go to Georgia to undergo medical treatment or complex surgery by traveling first to North Ossetia in Russia then entering Georgia at the Lars border checkpoint to the east of South Ossetia. South Ossetians are able to do this because they have Russian passports, which do not require Georgian visas. After making it through this border the people continue on to Tbilisi for treatment. Health facilities in South Ossetia and the North Caucasus in Russia are inferior to Georgia's making it an attractive destination despite the amount of effort needed to make the journey. Furthermore, thanks to a Georgian policy put in place after Saakashvili left office, the treatment is free. Georgia pays the private hospitals that treat Ossetians from the annual budget. Zakareishvili stated in 2015 that the main goal of the program was for Ossetians to "continue to trust our program and receive substantial medical assistance in our clinics." South Ossetian officials have criticized residents for pursuing healthcare in this

¹²⁷ Menabde, Giorgi. "Why Are Ossetians and Abkhazians Coming to Georgia for Medical Treatment?" *The Jamestown Foundation*. 9 March 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43639&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=11940435aa803633976cbab25fc2ba81#.VwWMscfm-G9

manner, but without attractive alternatives, South Ossetians continue to travel to Tbilisi.¹²⁸ This approach from Georgia shows their efforts to serve their citizens despite the political differences that exist between the regions and Georgia. It is a smart way for Georgia to actively attract breakaway residents to Georgia and keep them away from Russia.

Unlike Abkhazia, South Ossetian officials have never hidden their desire to join the Russian Federation. In September 2008, the South Ossetian president infamously greeted the Russian recognition of South Ossetia by saying, “we look forward to uniting with North Ossetia and joining the Russian Federation.”¹²⁹ In December 2015, the South Ossetian President Leonid Tibilov told journalists that South Ossetia was planning a referendum to join Russia before the next presidential election in April 2017, while simultaneously proposing to rename the region the Republic of South Ossetia—Alania to match the Republic of North Ossetia—Alania. Tibilov went so far as to say that unifying North and South Ossetia was “the eternal dream of our entire people.”¹³⁰ The two regions are already aligned in a number of ways, including their flags, which are different only in official dimensions.¹³¹

It is highly unlikely that South Ossetia would move away from this position, but Moscow has been generally silent on the issue. North Ossetia is unenthusiastic about the two joining, with one official saying that it should not happen for another 15-20 years.¹³² Russia refuses to comment on the issue, because 1) there is no benefit to officially settling the dispute with Georgia by accepting South Ossetia into the federation, and 2) Russia already funds 90-99

¹²⁸ Menabde, “Why are Ossetians.”

¹²⁹ Toal, Gerard and John O’Loughlin. *Inside South Ossetia: A Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State*. University of Colorado. 2010. 22.

¹³⁰ Fuller, Liz. “De Facto President Proposes Renaming Republic Of South Ossetia.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 30 December 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.rferl.org/content/caucasus-report-south-ossetia-namechange/27458314.html>

¹³¹ Toal, 22.

¹³² Fuller, “De Facto President.”

percent of the region's budget in addition to securing its borders. There is no strategic incentive for Russia to go any further in the acceptance of South Ossetia.

V. Digital

The Russian government understands the value of information and the power in controlling it, both inside and outside its borders. In what is often called "information wars," Russia and other nations compete for supporters using all types of media. However, the largest area of growth and influence lies in television and the Internet. While television is relatively straightforward to control via companies, the Internet is by nature far more elusive (assuming people have access). Russia's strategy for control in the digital realm reflects an understanding of both categories, allowing the government to control the messages being sent to the breakaway regions.

Television

Most Russians get their news from television (85 percent), and the state controls nearly all the channels directly or indirectly.¹³³ There are three main channels; Channel One and Russia One are popular federal channels while Gazprom, the state-controlled energy company, controls NTV. While these stations operate inside Russia, RT is the state-funded international English-language satellite news that works to present "global news from a Russian perspective." This perspective has become much more nationalistic since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis and annexation of Crimea.¹³⁴ This nationalist viewpoint can be seen in programming like the 2015

¹³³ "Trust in Russian state-run TV down by half – survey." *Belsat TV*. 16 December 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://belsat.eu/en/news/trust-in-russian-state-run-tv-down-by-half-survey/>

¹³⁴ "Russia profile - Media." *BBC News*. 25 February 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17840134>

release of a documentary film called *Crimea: The Way Home*, which includes an interview with President Putin justifying his actions during the crisis.¹³⁵

Ukraine

In an effort to oppose one another, the Ukrainian government and Russia have restricted access to information via television. In the Russian- or separatist- controlled regions of Eastern Ukraine, pro-Ukrainian news outlets have been cut while Russian channels have been banned in the rest of Ukraine.¹³⁶ According to Freedom House, 15 Russian channels were suspended for judicial review in Ukraine because they “incited hatred, threatened national security, or supported separatism.” In 2014 broadcasting control continuously flipped sides whenever territory changed hands. Even with all the fighting and political turmoil, Ukraine’s press freedom was upgraded from Not Free to Partly Free.¹³⁷ Russia’s status remained Not Free and with its score becoming even worse than the year before. Freedom House explicitly cites the occupation of Crimea and involvement in Eastern Ukraine as a driving factor towards poorer press freedom.¹³⁸

Abkhazia and South Ossetia

In Abkhazia, Russian or state-controlled television channels are the main sources of broadcast news, while access to Georgian television is rare and limited to satellite. Abkhazia has

¹³⁵ “Crimea: The Way Back Home-EN Subtitles-Full Documentary (VIDEO).” *Sott.net*. 24 March 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://www.sott.net/article/294197-Crimea-The-Way-Back-Home-EN-Subtitles-Full-Documentary-VIDEO>

¹³⁶ “Ukraine profile - Media.” *BBC News*. 13 July 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18006248>

¹³⁷ “Freedom of the Press, Ukraine.” *Freedom House*. Freedom House, 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/ukraine>

¹³⁸ “Freedom of the Press, Russia.” *Freedom House*. Freedom House, 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/russia>

one state-run television outlet that reaches all of Abkhazia and one private outlet, Abaza-TV, which is only accessible in the capital. The state channel broadcasts in both Russian and Abkhaz, and both sources are generally negative towards Georgia. While there are only two Abkhazian-run channels, all of the major Russian channels are broadcasted in the region.¹³⁹

South Ossetia has similar restrictions on broadcasting. The government controls all local broadcasts and private ones are banned. OSInform is the news agency operated by the South Ossetian State Committee for TV and Radio Broadcasting.¹⁴⁰ According to Freedom House, in 2015 Russian and Georgian broadcasts were available, but it is unclear what exactly is being viewed in the region.¹⁴¹ There is clearly limited exposure to other news sources giving Russian media a large amount of influence in both regions. Knowledge is power, and Russia currently dominates the news reaching Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Internet and Telecommunications

The Russian Government has made the Internet a large priority in its efforts to control the media. As mentioned earlier, within Russia the government has created a blacklist of websites, restricting access for the nearly 87 million Russians using the Internet. Russia's Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) is the agency with the authority to "carry out permitting and licensing activities, validation and supervision in the spheres of telecommunications, information technologies and

¹³⁹ International Crisis Group.

¹⁴⁰ "Regions and territories: South Ossetia." *BBC News*. 25 April 2012. Web. 12 April 2016. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3797729.stm

¹⁴¹ "Freedom in the World, South Ossetia." *Freedom House*. Freedom House, 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/south-ossetia>

mass communications.”¹⁴² As mentioned earlier, in 2013 VKontakte was briefly banned by the agency, supposedly because the owner refused to shut down online forums for opposition activists.¹⁴³ Clearly within Russia, the government is doing everything it can to control citizens’ Internet usage. The government has also been supporting the idea of *rususkii mir* or “Russian world” through the Internet by pushing for more domain names in the Cyrillic alphabet.¹⁴⁴ This is an effort to unite Russian-speakers no matter where they are. In the breakaway regions, Russia is following a similar strategy of control by competing with Western news sources and supplying the regions with telecommunication support.

Ukraine

In Ukraine Russia’s approach includes what has become known as a “troll” army. Taia Global released a report last year that connected the Russian FSB to the practice. According to the report, Russia planned to use the Internet to gain influence and corrupt social media postings in Ukraine and Russia. The group creates fake accounts that post thousands of comments and articles to support the Russian position and criticize the Ukrainians.¹⁴⁵ The BBC reported in March 2015 that the Internet Research Agency is a front for this army. Although some experts remain unconvinced that the Russian government would be successful in changing public

¹⁴² “Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (ROSKOMNADZOR).” *Федеральной службы по надзору в сфере связи, информационных технологий и массовых коммуникаций*. 3 March 2014. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://rkn.gov.ru/eng/>

¹⁴³ “Top Russian Social Network Blacklisted By 'Mistake.'” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 24 May 2013. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://www.rferl.org/content/vkontakte-blacklist-ban-russia-mistake/24996067.html>

¹⁴⁴ “Russia profile - Media.”

¹⁴⁵ “Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Internet Operations Against Ukraine.” *TAIA Global, INC*. 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <https://taia.global/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/FSB-IO-UKRAINE.pdf>

conscience, others believe that the real goal is to create confusion by filling the Internet with rumors and conspiracy theories.¹⁴⁶

Ukraine responded to these efforts by creating its own Internet army. Ukraine's information minister Yuri Stec stated:

Many fronts have opened against us, and one of the crucial ones is the information front... The war is real, and the information on it is false. Through this project, I hope we will have a lot of volunteers willing to distribute accurate information and expose Russian lies.

The ministry set up a web site where anyone can sign up and receive tasks to complete on social media to promote Ukraine's message.¹⁴⁷ Essentially, Ukraine and Russia are both using fake accounts to promote their positions in the Ukrainian crisis.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have far less Internet traffic than Ukraine, but Russia exerts influence in these regions through the control of telecommunication companies. In Abkhazia Internet usage has grown to about 25%¹⁴⁸ under two main companies, A-Mobile and Aquaфон. Aquaфон held a monopoly over Abkhazia until 2006 when Russian and Abkhaz businessmen established A-Mobile. Both carriers are headquartered in Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, and largely serve Russian users traveling to the region due to the low rates of local users.¹⁴⁹ Megafon, the second largest provider in Russia, bought Aquaфон in 2009 by buying a

¹⁴⁶ Bugorkova, Olga. "Ukraine conflict: Inside Russia's 'Kremlin troll army.'" *BBC News*. 19 March 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31962644>

¹⁴⁷ Kottasova, Ivana. "Ukraine recruits Internet army to fight Russian trolls." *CNN Money*. 25 February 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://money.cnn.com/2015/02/25/technology/ukraine-russia-internet-army/>

¹⁴⁸ "Freedom in the World, Abkhazia." *Freedom House*. 2015. Web. 21 February 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/Abkhazia>

¹⁴⁹ Zolotova, Tatiana. "Абхазский 'Аквафон-GSM' запустил 3G-сеть." *COMNEWS*. 7 November 2008. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://www.comnews.ru/node/18859>

100% stake in Depton Investment Ltd., which holds 51% stakes in Aquafon and Ostelecom, the South Ossetian operator.¹⁵⁰ As the only providers in the area, Russian businesses have full control of Abkhazia's Internet and mobile access.

In South Ossetia, Megafon faced a fine from the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) of roughly \$350,000 for supplying unlicensed service to users in the region in 2008. The GNCC claimed that Megafon began expanding service in conjunction with the arrival of Russian military for the 2008 war, calling the company a political player for the Russian Government. As of October 2008, the fines had not been paid, and it can be assumed that they will never be paid given South Ossetia's partially recognized political status.¹⁵¹ Further aggravating the Georgian government, in the summer of 2014 Russia's Ministry of Communications signed a numbering agreement with South Ossetia to "to give numbering resources to South Ossetia for use until the region is handed its own separate international dialing code from the ITU." The GNCC fired back by releasing a statement that South Ossetia is internationally recognized as a part of Georgia and cannot enter the ITU as independent with the government's consent.¹⁵² It seems that Georgia and Russia these days are fighting in the legal realm of telecommunications more so than they are in physical confrontations.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia now have no choice but to rely on Russian telecommunications and network capabilities. These disputes with Georgia further establish Russia's willingness to violate international law in all types of industries. The digital stage is

¹⁵⁰ "Aquafon launches LTE in main cities." *TeleGeography*. 8 August 2014. Web. 21 February 2016. <https://www.telegeography.com/products/commsupdate/articles/2014/08/08/aquafon-launches-lte-in-main-cities/>

¹⁵¹ Patsuria, Nino. "Georgia: The Fight between Tbilisi and Moscow Over South Ossetia Goes Cellular." *Eurasianet.org*. 22 October 2008. Web. 21 February 2016. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav102308b.shtml>

¹⁵² "GNCC opposes Russia, South Ossetia numbering deal." *TeleGeography*. 11 June 2014. Web. 21 February 2016. <https://www.telegeography.com/products/commsupdate/articles/2014/06/11/gncc-opposes-russia-south-ossetia-numbering-deal/>

practically brand new to the region and will only become more important moving forward as Georgia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia seek to modernize their societies. Russia has set itself up to be the master of this technology, undermining any efforts Georgia is making to remain connected to the regions.

VI. Conclusions: Effectiveness of Russian Soft Power

Russia understands the importance of using soft power to help achieve its goals in the region and further its global strategy. The government has used a great number of methods to do so, including efforts in culture, engagement, and digital categories. Russian soft power exists in a passive manner through language and history, but Russia also actively uses its soft power to both oppose other countries and convince populations in the breakaway regions. Often, its policies seek to do both at the same time. Russian soft power can be divided into four different divisions as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Russian Soft Power Categories

	Convince (Breakaway Regions)	Oppose (Ukraine and Georgia)
Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Aid • Humanitarian Aid • State Recognition • Television • Music • Internet and Telecommunications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eurovision Song Contest, Music • Internet and Telecommunications • Television
Passive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language in Eastern Ukraine • Tourism in Abkhazia and Crimea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare

These examples demonstrate the wide range of soft power tools being employed by Russia.

Notice that some examples can be listed in multiple divisions because the targets are different.

Although we have identified a number of cases in which soft power is being employed, it is hard to determine whether or not the strategy has been effective. A number of resources, like

the Soft Power 30, seek to quantify soft power into a ranking system, but evaluating how soft power is affecting another state's policies is tricky to identify. The first step in attempting this feat is to understand what State A wants State B to do. In these cases, what is Russia trying to achieve with its soft power tactics?

Russia is pursuing a foreign policy in which it creates or enflames conflicts in neighboring countries for its own benefit. It is not a coincidence that Russia maintains military bases in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, and Transnistria where conflicts occur. Russia exacerbates tensions in these regions by supporting separatists, calling for their international recognition, and then giving aid to the breakaway governments. This is not just a pattern; it's a formula for ensuring Russian importance in its historical sphere of influence.

Russia's engagement of states in conflict serves a number of purposes. The first is that it hinders the ability of both Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO and the EU, thus leaving Russia's sphere of influence and joining the West. Territorial integrity is essential for Georgia and Ukraine to become a member of these organizations, and since Russia supports breakaway territories, they cannot be reintegrated into their respective states. Therefore, Georgia and Ukraine cannot regain the land or make strong cases for membership in either group. Both organizations remain skeptical of Georgia and Ukraine joining and then drawing all the members into a larger conflict. NATO countries remain split on the issue of ascension for a number of reasons. Although countries like Montenegro have been invited to join NATO, Georgia remains without the essential NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) largely because not all countries in the alliance are prepared to defend Georgia in the event of another attack from Russia. While Georgian officials believe that NATO membership would grant security and stability, France, Germany, and other NATO countries think the exact opposite. This same argument can be

applied to Ukraine, which is now in almost the same position as Georgia.¹⁵³ Admitting either country into NATO would be a clear statement that the alliance members would counter a Russian attack, but right now none of the allies are willing to face off against Russia.

Secondly, these conflicts distract their respective governments from being able to implement reform. According to Robert Ortung and Christopher Walker,

“A basic prerequisite for democracy and democratic state-building is control over one’s territory. By undermining its neighbors’ territorial integrity, Russia seeks to distract the governments in Kiev, Kishinev (Moldova), and Tbilisi from successfully pursuing reforms to reduce corruption and build representative institutions. Instead of concentrating on improving their own governance, these disrupted countries must deal with the charged and emotional issues associated with territorial conflict.”¹⁵⁴

Resolving issues with Russia has been a top priority for the Georgian government, and in 2012 it led to the election of the Georgian Dream Coalition, which ran on the platform of improving relations with Russia. Instead of focusing on other domestic issues, the Georgian people and government turned much of their attention towards Russia and the breakaway regions. When asked in a survey in 2014, Georgians named “territorial integrity” as one of the top three national issues facing the country, and 42 percent said, “Russia was a real and existing threat to Georgia.”¹⁵⁵ Likewise, the Ukrainian government has been engrossed in the implementation of the Minsk ceasefire agreed upon in 2015. Ukraine has no choice but to make the armed conflict its first priority, while it also struggles with numerous other problems like the economy.

Thirdly, Russia is able to use these frozen conflicts as a buffer between itself and the West. Independence for each breakaway region is not the Russian goal, despite its rhetoric of supporting democracy. Rather, the deadlock in each country ensures that the West cannot expand

¹⁵³ Dempsey, Judy. “NATO Membership for Montenegro but Not for Georgia.” *Carnegie Europe*. 7 December 2015. Web. 12 April 2016. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=62197>

¹⁵⁴ Ortung, Robert and Christopher Walker. “Putin’s Frozen Conflicts.” *Foreign Policy*. 13 February 2015. Web. 27 April 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/13/putins-frozen-conflicts/>

¹⁵⁵ Wilfore, Kristina. *Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of an August 2014 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC-Georgia*. National Democratic Institute. 2014.

further, and Russia can use the regions as leverage in international decision-making. If a breakaway region were to gain full, internationally recognized independence or join Russia, the country it left would have an easier time joining the EU and NATO without a territorial issue. For example, in Ukraine, if the Donbass region joined Russia, then the Western side of Ukraine would more easily be able to pass a referendum to join either the EU or NATO, assuming NATO and the EU would accept the decision. In the end, Russia would extend its borders, but only to be next to an even more western-leaning country that does not behave as Moscow wishes. By keeping Ukraine and Georgia's breakaway regions in a liminal status internationally, Russia is able to keep Ukraine and Georgia as buffers between itself and the encroaching West.

Finally, Russia uses these countries and regions to prove its might and political importance. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia lost its ability to effectively push its agenda, and the United States rose as a global hegemon. Through renewed conflict and involvement, Russia flexes its military power and soft power, and is able to once again affect international policy. Both large and small actions in Georgia and Ukraine are used to remind the West that Russia is still important and in control of the region. Western countries cannot make advances in allegiances with Georgia and Ukraine without first considering how Russia would respond. That is exactly what Russia wants. Russia does not necessarily need or want to have direct control over more territory or rebuild an empire, but it wants to have big seat at the table when international decisions are made.

So, is Russian soft power the force keeping these regions and countries under Russian influence? It depends on the intended audience and purpose of the message. Russian soft power that opposes international targets, like Ukraine and Georgia, has been largely effective, because these governments have *acknowledged* that Russian soft power is being used and *must be*

countered. Even if Russian soft power is not effective at changing policy in the breakaway regions, its soft power is getting a large amount of publicity internationally. Other states believe that it is important enough to discuss, which, according to Jason Parker, means that it is working. In other words, soft power works as long as others *believe* that it works.¹⁵⁶ While Russia pours money, time, and effort into remaining relevant in the international system, Ukraine and Georgia are doing the same in their efforts to counter Russian influence. Opposing Russian soft power has become a priority. In the Georgian President's State of the State address in 2015, he directly referenced the issue saying, "Georgia is one of the targets of Russia's global propaganda-ideological campaign. The essence of this campaign is to divert Georgia from European and Euro-Atlantic choice through so called 'soft power'," and that "consolidation of pro-western agenda within the country is required in order to [repel] this attack."¹⁵⁷ Neither Georgia nor Ukraine has been able to join NATO or the EU due to these frozen conflicts and perceived soft power attacks by Russia.

The biggest issue facing Russian soft power today is deciding how much money and political capital can be spent maintaining their hold in these regions. For example, consider the differences between Russian actions in Crimea versus Abkhazia. In 2008, Russia was on the verge of taking complete control of Tbilisi and Georgia but withdrew. Not only did Russia withdraw, but also it did not annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Instead it established the two as independent countries. It is true that Russia has *effectively* annexed the regions, but the lack of an official declaration is important, because Crimea was *officially* annexed by Russia in 2014. This

¹⁵⁶ As Jason Parker discussed in his lecture, "Hearts, Minds, Voices: Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the 'Third World'," at the Merzhon Center for International Security Studies on February 29, 2016.

¹⁵⁷ "In State of Nation Address, President Asks Who is in Charge." *Civil.ge*. 31 March 2015. Web. 12 April 2015. <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28174>

nance tells us that Russia did not deem it worthwhile enough to officially take control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia like it did Crimea. Why?

The Crimean people are much more closely aligned with Russia in terms of language, ethnicity, and culture than Abkhazia or South Ossetia. This is where passive soft power plays a large role. Crimea did not push for independence from Ukraine as Abkhazia and South Ossetia did from Georgia in the 1990s and 2008. Instead, Crimea held a referendum to immediately join Russia. Whether or not the referendum was representative of the Crimean people's wishes is a matter of debate for another paper. The point here is that Crimea never wanted to be a completely independent country so the political cost to annexing the region was much lower than the cost of annexing regions that had pushed for independence for a number of years. Even though the West condemned the annexation and placed sanctions on Russian businessmen, most of the ordinary Russian citizens approved of the move based on the perceived desires of the Crimean people. This would have been a far more difficult case to make for official annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008.

Russian soft power is more limited in the breakaway regions. Eastern Ukraine and South Ossetia have expressed their desires to join the Russian Federation, but the Russian Government has refrained from accepting them, because it does not further its overall strategy. Russia's indifferent posture could negatively affect the opinion of the populations in these regions. Furthermore, the amount of aid that Russia says it is providing does not always reach the population due to corruption. People have been stuck trying to survive paycheck-to-paycheck or forced to travel great distances to receive healthcare, because modern clinics are not available. This is hardly a good way for Russia to garner support for its policies. Abkhazia's situation is a little different than South Ossetia and Ukraine, because the breakaway region has never

expressed a serious desire to join Russia. The Abkhazians have always sought independence, and view Russian support as the means to that end.

At this point, there is no reason for Russia to abandon its soft power strategy, because it has helped keep the West from coming too close to Russia's borders. While the people in the breakaway regions may not be convinced of Russia's power, the international community is certainly paying more attention to Russia's moves off the battlefield. Russia has successfully opposed the West.

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